Colonial America in the 18th Century

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1700-1775
10× growth – population
– area

The founding of Pennsylvania in 1681 and of Georgia in 1732 confirmed what already had become clear: Europeans, mostly British, were permanent occupants of the most productive eastern margin of the New World. Between 1700 and 1775 the population of the eastern seaboard colonies (often called provinces) grew nearly ten times, as did the area occupied. The massive overtaking of the continent and of aboriginal lands, so conspicuous in the next century, was well under way, as colonizers filled the spaces between the discrete coastal settlements of the 17th century. Expansion reflected economic growth and in turn was a major factor in that growth. Economic specialization and diversification were becoming more evident, and for most whites living standards improved.

The result was an increased sharing of colonial experiences, leading toward greater homogenization among whites and broader regional behaviors. As the 18th century progressed, neither the Natives nor their allies in New France could hold back this inland movement. Yet, even as the French lost Quebec in 1759 and the British became undisputed masters of the land, British rules and regulations began to unravel in the colonies from New England southward. By 1775 many people, most removed by one or several generations from Britain, had come to see themselves as Americans first, even though the colonies seemed to be converging demographically and socially with the mother country. The first, and largest, colonial revolt in the New World was to produce a robust new nation that would put its own profound stamp on the world over subsequent centuries.

POPULATION: GROWTH, EXPANSION, AND COMPOSITION

Factors in Growth

By 1775 the population of the colonies had reached almost 2.5 million, compared with only 250,000 in 1700 (table 6.1). The tenfold increase was the result of a rate of growth averaging about 3 percent per year. This rate was rapid for the time, and thus the population jumped from 1/20 to 1/3 of Britain's. The gap continued to narrow after 1776, and by 1820 the population of the United States had overtaken Britain's. In contrast to Third World nations today with similar rates of growth, the colonies possessed the space, resources, and organization to maintain the highest average and probably most equitable standard of living in the world—at least for whites. Relatively few experienced starvation or even malnutrition. The gloomy late-18th-century prediction of the English reverend doctor Thomas Malthus—that the high population growth would eventually outstrip resources—was irrelevant in white, and even black, America.

Benjamin Franklin, newspaper publisher and social philosopher living in rapidly growing Philadelphia, described population change quite accurately in his *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind,* published at midcentury. He reported that marriages were occurring at a younger age and with greater frequency in the marriageable age group as the century progressed. As America's population closed in on Britain's, Franklin predicted that economic power would eventually shift across the Atlantic to America.

Birthrates persisted at a higher level in America than in England during the 18th century, especially in new settlements. American couples continued to marry earlier, leading to earlier births and adding more quickly to growth. They stopped sooner, however, so that the completed family size in America—5.5—was not much larger than the British figure of 5.0. Black reproduction rates gradually approached the white level, as the black sex ratio came into balance late in the century. Somewhat lower death rates, owing to healthier diets and a larger rural share, also contributed to growth. London was a death trap for many, in contrast to the far smaller colonial

Table 6.1 Estimated Populations of the American Provinces, 1700–1780 (in thousands)

Province or Colony	1700	1720	1740	1760	1780	Increase 1700–1780	% Total Pop. 1700	% Total Pop. 1775
(Maine)[a]	—	—	—	20	49			
(Vermont)[a]	—	—	—	—	48			
New Hampshire	5.0	9.4	23	39	88			
Massachusetts	56	91	152	203	269			
Rhode Island	5.9	12	25	45	53			
Connecticut	26	59	90	142	207			
NEW ENGLAND	93	171	290	449	714	7.5 times	37	26
% black	2				3[b]			
New York	19	37	64	117	211			
New Jersey	14	30	51	94	140			
Pennsylvania	18	31	86	184	327			
MID-ATLANTIC	51	98	201	395	678	13 times	21	24
% black	8				6[b]			
Delaware	2.5	5.4	20	33	45			
Maryland	30	66	116	162	245			
Virginia	59	88	180	340	538			
UPPER SOUTH	92	159	316	535	828	9 times	35	31
% black	23				37[b]			
North Carolina	11	21	52	110	270			
South Carolina	5.7	17	45	94	180			
Georgia	—	—	2.0	9.6	56			
LOWER SOUTH	17	38	99	214	506	30 times	6	17
% black	19				41[b]			
(Kentucky)[a]	—	—	—	—	45			
(Tennessee)[a]	—	—	—	—	10			
WEST	—	—	—	—	55		0	1
% black					17[b]			
TOTAL POPULATION[c]	251	466	906	1,594	2,780	11 times	100	100
% black	11				21[b]			

[a]Not organized as provinces or states by 1780. Maine part of Massachusetts; Vermont part of New York (disputed); Kentucky originally an extension of Virginia, and Tennessee of North Carolina.
[b]1775
[c]Imperfect sums because of rounding

cities. By later standards infant mortality remained high, yet probably three-quarters of colonial children survived to age 15, compared with two-thirds in England. Most could look forward to living the biblical three score and ten. American blacks were healthier and lived longer than those in the morbid working environments of the Caribbean sugar islands, though that could not compensate for their chattel status.

Immigration rose substantially after 1700 and was a prime contributor to America's rate of population growth being higher than England's. Between 1700 and 1775 about 370,000 Europeans and 250,000 Africans arrived. By one estimate, white immigrants added 25 percent to the population over this time, and of course they multiplied. But as the total grew larger, the immigrant share declined. By the 1770s perhaps only one white person in ten was born outside the colonies, the other nine thus having no direct memory of Britain. The impact of black immigration persisted longer because of the increasing

importance of slavery, and blacks' share of the population nearly doubled to about one in five. An unknown but probably small number of settlers returned to their homeland, an option that blacks did not enjoy.

Distribution and Expansion

While all colonies grew, significant shifts in regional shares occurred (table 6.1; fig. 6.1). The upper South—the Chesapeake Bay area—and southern New England were the areas of oldest settlement, and together they dropped from nearly three-quarters of the total population to less than three-fifths. The Mason-Dixon line (the Pennsylvania-Maryland border) divided the population almost equally between South and North by 1775, and slavery confined almost 90 percent of the rapidly increasing black population south of the line. New England experienced the slowest growth, the lower South the fastest. Among individual colonies, Virginia maintained its lead, while Massachusetts, partly owing to a lower birthrate and also a shortage of good lands, yielded second place to Pennsylvania, the leading success story of the century.

By 1700 settlements were virtually contiguous from Norfolk, Virginia, to north of Portsmouth, New Hampshire (fig. 6.1). South of Norfolk only small, discrete settlements developed, the largest around Charleston. Penetration inland was still limited, being no more than 30 miles beyond tidewater except up the valleys of the Connecticut and the Hudson. Between 1700 and 1740 the strongest thrust inland was in Pennsylvania and into the backcountry of the upper South. Philadelphia was the major port of entry for immigrants. After 1740 the population of the lower South expanded greatly, and by 1775 colonists occupied almost all land east of the Appalachians, including many a fertile mountain valley. They were spilling out beyond the Appalachians in step with the rate of population growth.

Rural and Urban

Population was overwhelmingly rural. Densities varied with the timing of settlement, with access to seacoast markets, and with land quality. In Chester County, Pennsylvania (near Philadelphia), for example, by 1760 densities reached 30 to 40 persons per square mile. Densities remained lower than in much of rural England because offspring could choose to move west. Densities would once again start increasing after about 1790 with further agricultural and industrial intensification, and with them an expansion of wage labor. Before then, people had spread out over a larger space than actually required for their sustenance, driven by the lust for property. Landownership was the goal of most migrants from Europe, seeking to escape the constraints of courts, clergy, and crop failures. In 1775 only about 5 percent of the colonists lived in urban places, their farming being no more than garden plots. In fact, the proportion of urban dwellers fell during the 75-year period, even though most of the seaports and new inland towns grew. Regional variations were marked. The Chesapeake tobacco region, for example, was weakly urbanized, whereas urbanization in North and South Carolina was much greater.

CULTURAL COMPOSITION: ETHNICITY, RACE, AND RELIGION

America's white population became more heterogeneous during the 18th century, even in what had been hitherto the very English colonies of New England and Virginia. By 1775 those of English ancestry may have fallen to barely two-thirds of the white population. Estimates vary—a consequence of intractable data—but it is clear that other parts of the British Isles and German-speaking areas of western Europe sent many settlers. The so-called Scots-Irish from Ulster (northern Ireland) settled most thickly in parts of southeastern Pennsylvania, then also in the backcountry of that colony and of the South, and in New Hampshire. Welsh were most conspicuous in eastern Pennsylvania, lowland Scots in East Jersey and the Carolinas. German-speaking settlers arrived from the Rhine valley and Switzerland in increasing numbers until the onset of the Seven Years' War in 1755; few would come again until the mid-19th century. They too sought Pennsylvania primarily, and by 1775 about one American in ten was German. The Dutch had clustered in New York, adjacent East Jersey, and along the Delaware River since the 1620s, but their descendants made up only a small share. Except for some Germans, most settlers spoke, or came to speak, English. Ezra

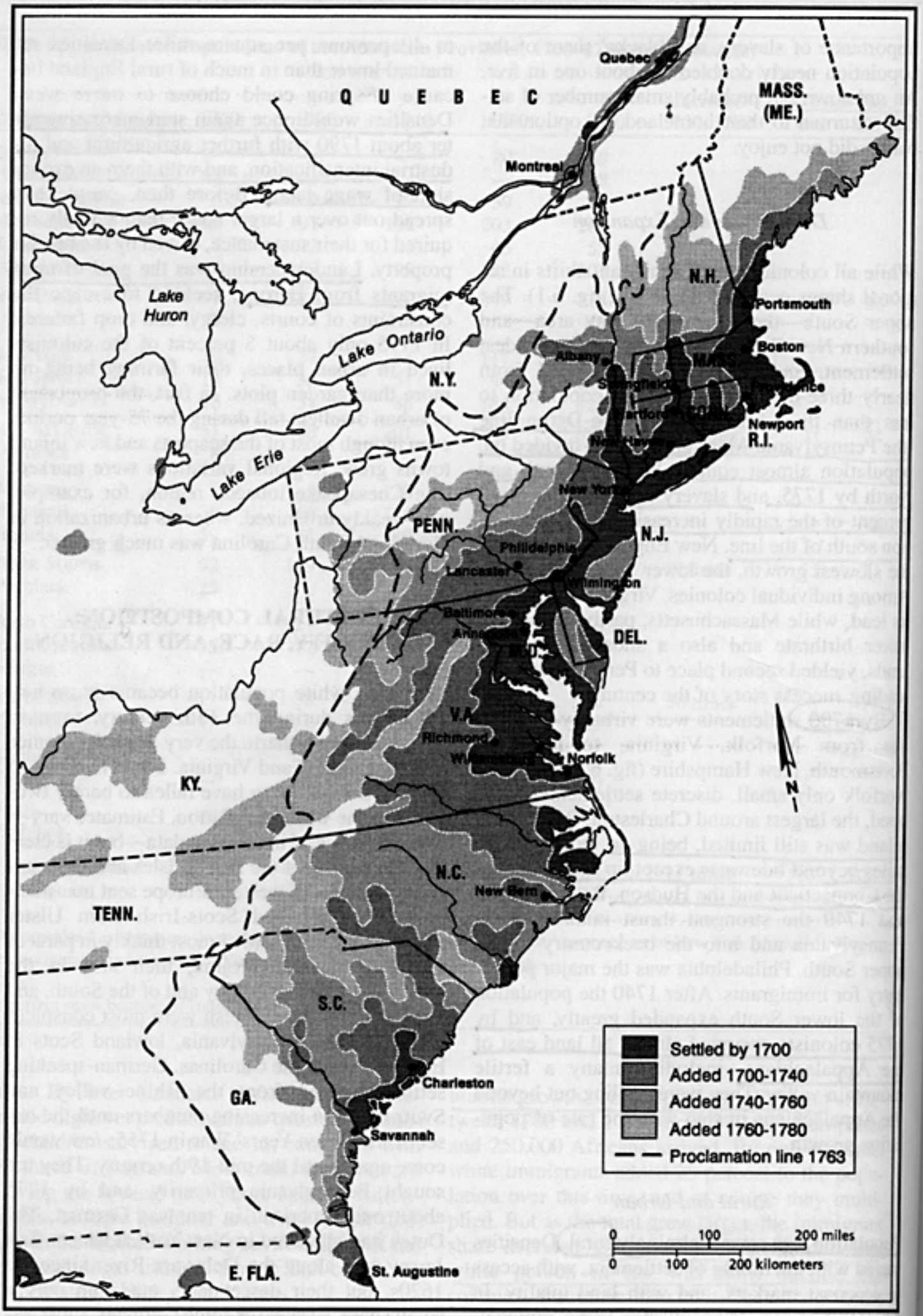

Figure 6.1 Population Distribution, 1700–1780

Styles of Connecticut predicted that English would "become the vernacular tongue of more people than any one tongue on Earth except the Chinese." Colonists of English ancestry were the dominant majority and chief bearers of institutions, and they could not be an ethnic group like the others.

The racial gulf between black and white and between Native and white was in each case enormous, and ethnic differences among whites pale in comparison. By 1775 blacks constituted one person in five, nearly double their share in 1700 (table 6.1). They were concentrated in the South, running up to almost 55 percent in South Carolina. In the North, only in New York City did blacks reach 10 percent. Over 90 percent were slaves, and even the few free blacks remained in the bottom rank of the social hierarchy. Few had hope of advancement; few held landed property. Black children learned early to defer to white masters and accept being sold as commodities. Rebellion could lead to severe punishment, and even death.

White mistreatment of Native Americans was of a totally different order. The decimation of eastern populations by European diseases had largely run its course by 1750. The Iroquois Confederacy in the colony of New York and the Cherokees and Creeks in the Southeast remained formidable adversaries for decades to come. But settlers pushed westward nonetheless, transgressing the settlement limit for the colonies defined by the British Proclamation Line of 1763 (fig. 6.1). This line followed the watershed between the rivers flowing directly into the Atlantic and those headed for the Mississippi or St. Lawrence. The great tension between whites and Natives concerned their perception of land; the liberal democratic power of whites, favoring freehold, ran roughshod over the collective order of the aboriginals.

Most whites were Protestant, but of many persuasions, and Roman Catholics were a small minority. The Church of England was the largest denomination, especially strong in the Chesapeake region. Bishops did appear eventually overseas, but traditional ecclesiastical arrangements were weakened considerably at first. Colonial Anglicans increasingly found themselves minorities, albeit of high status, as new groups moved in. The Episcopal Church (as the Church of England was called after 1776) retains its high status to the present, a sign that cultural continuity has been stronger than political orientation.

Eighteenth-century Americans replicated European regional and national denominations that arose out of the Reformation of the 16th century. Among Calvinists were Congregationalists of the Puritan tradition in New England, Presbyterians from Ulster and Scotland, and Reformed from some German states and the Netherlands in many colonies, particularly Pennsylvania. German-speaking Lutherans from other German states also favored Pennsylvania. Friends, known as Quakers, and as "plain folk" for their rejection of ostentation, dominated the earlier decades of Pennsylvania but located elsewhere as well. Mennonites, Amish, and various Baptist groups were plain folk also. Almost every conceivable Christian doctrinal strand was found in America. And later strands emerged, including Methodism of English origin in many areas and Unitarianism in New England. Some of the waves of evangelical fervor that periodically gripped many colonials originated there. The Great Awakening of the 1740s combined English and American nuances, spawning new groupings under charismatic leaders. Blacks gradually became Christian but not without weaving in traditional African customs.

Religious congregations were basic building blocks of local communities. At the same time, members of all denominations had to learn to live with one another. What had been national or regional churches overseas had become denominations in America. Historical interpretations, especially in the late 19th century, drew sharp distinctions in attitudes and practices among ethnic groups; recent scholarship is more reluctant to do so. European behavior was similar in most respects, notably regarding private property and diet. Further, none could escape the "Protestant ethic," emphasizing individual pursuit of success, enhanced greatly by the relatively open environment. Through Poor Richard's almanacs, Benjamin Franklin admonished his fellow countrymen to follow the rules of behavior that would lead to wealth and happiness.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

As European settlers spread themselves over the 18th-century landscape, they organized their

households on freehold properties and these into formal communities. The terms rural and urban provide one spatial categorization. Another set concerns local, county, regional, and national levels of government and religious organization. Yet another way of thinking calls attention to the entrepreneurs and investors enmeshed in commerce locally and regionally, and in the British Empire and Atlantic trading networks globally.

The distinction between rural and urban settlement, though time-honored in the literature and censuses, cannot be rigidly applied to 18th-century America, just as it cannot be today. Cities were tiny by today's standards, and their residents were engaged with rural dwellers in government, voluntary bodies, and commerce. It is indeed true that the hustle and bustle of trading, of the courts, and of the ale- and coffeehouses were concentrated in densely built-up urban places. But country crossroad hamlets—with their clusters of a few houses, an inn with a tavern, and possibly a church—were everywhere and were hardly distinguishable from the countryside. In fact, reversing the picture, many functions associated with urban life were also found in the country—most obviously on large southern plantations.

A majority of rural households lived on their own land in farmsteads spatially separated at varying distances from one another. Agricultural villages, so common in many parts of Europe, were few, and of those that were established only a handful survived for long. Such was the case in New England, despite several generations of historians who believed that Puritans had lived in tight spatial communities; new evidence indicates far more dispersal long before 1700. Likewise, in Pennsylvania, where founder William Penn sought to create tight community relations by settling people on home lots with fields at a distance, more or less like medieval villages, few agricultural villages survived. Even members of religious communities that demanded a strict code of behavior—Quakers, Mennonites, and Amish—lived on their own holdings, and Moravians, who had lived communally for a short time, gave up on the practice. The organizers of Savannah, Georgia, laid out a utopian landscape to settle marginal people off the streets of London, but that too failed. (Only Hutterites on the western plains have succeeded in maintaining villages on vast communally owned lands.) Separate and discrete holdings in America were replicating a process occurring in Britain. There, in stages over several centuries, the enclosure movement had resulted in the dispersal of farmsteads from villages and the fencing of medieval fields and common lands. Dispersed settlement was a sign of independence, of a liberalizing of society, and suited America.

As in Britain, irregularly shaped farm lots and fields were common during prerevolutionary generations (fig. 6.2). A few examples of long lots, mostly identified with the French, appeared adjacent to rivers. Roads were rarely straight over long distances, a fact still evident to today's motorists. An exception was in Pennsylvania, where settlers in the first two decades after 1681 occupied rectangular lots adjacent to straight roads (fig 6.3). Regularity indicated that survey occurred before settlement, whereas irregularity signaled that settlers had taken up land before officials had surveyed it. Sometimes the taking became a kind of free-for-all, as newcomers scrambled to be first on the best land, fertile and well watered. Oftentimes this process resulted in resurveying and court cases on overlapping claims. By 1775, however, regularity was becoming the norm, at least in northern New England. After 1783, the new federal government imposed the lot survey prior to settle-

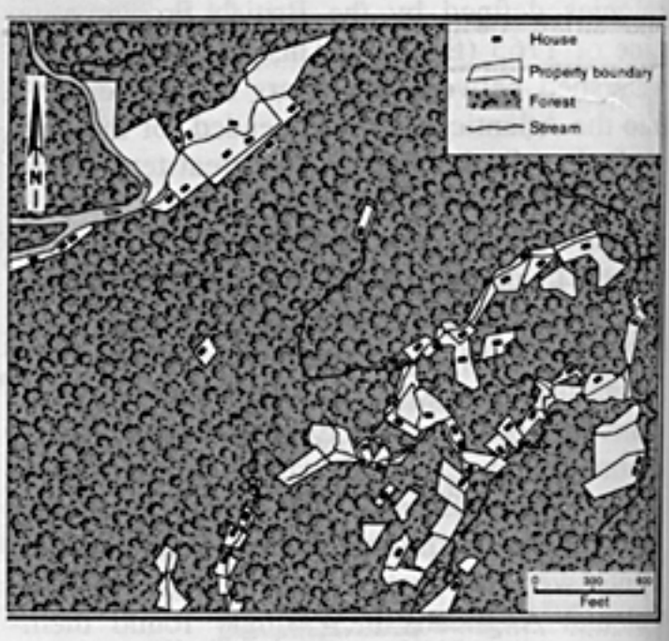

Figure 6.2 Dispersed Settlement in Northern New Jersey, Middle of the 18th Century.Density of forest overstated (after Wacker)

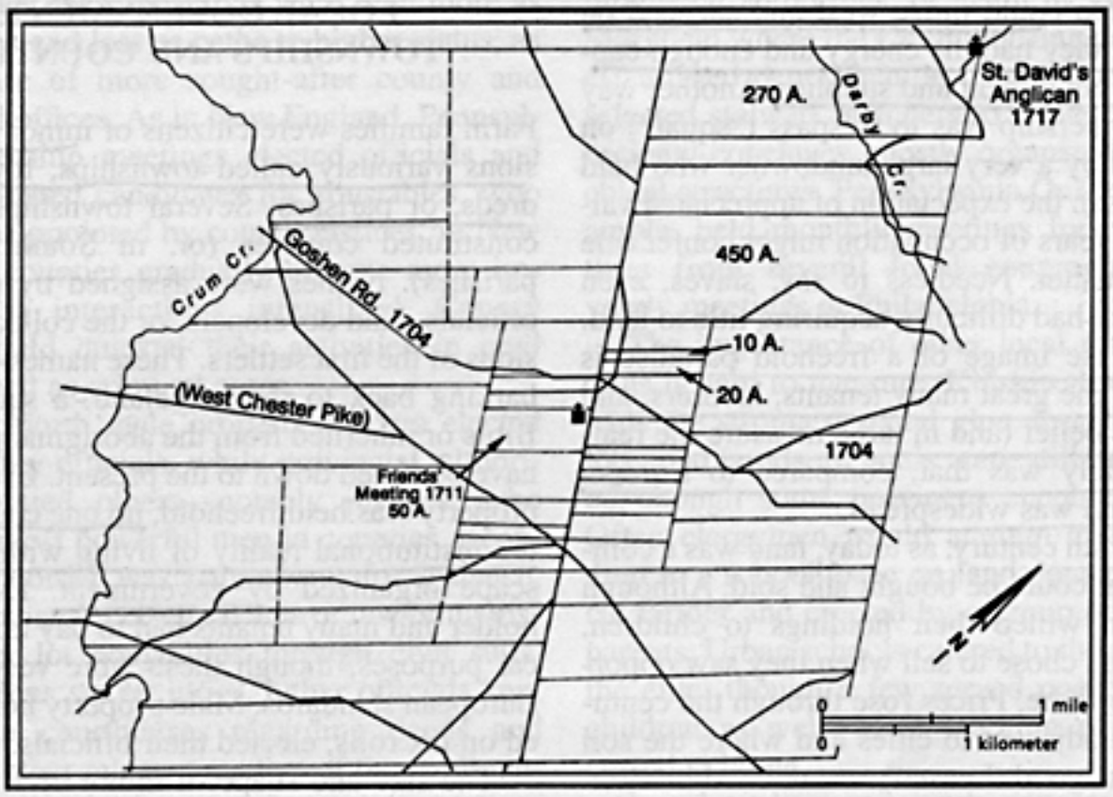

Figure 6.3 Newtown, Pennsylvania: A Failed Agricultural Village (after Lemon)

ment on land destined to be alienated to private citizens. This achievement is strikingly evident from the air. The officials took this initiative to speed up settlement and to earn revenue for government operations.

Colonial residents viewed land as freehold property and a sign of status. To the peasants and small farmers who came from Europe, where the much more spatially closed environments favored those few with power, the relatively open landscape in America was a resource to exploit both for use and for exchange. As in Europe, the more land one held and the better quality it was, the higher one's position in society. In the relatively egalitarian colonies white males owned thousands of parcels of land independently, yet through the decades better-off farmers amassed large properties and pulled ahead of their neighbors. Landownership was widespread in the North, but somewhat less so (among whites) in the South. Ownership was not quite absolute, for in some colonies settlers and their descendants had to pay quitrents (ground rents) to proprietors. The War of Independence wiped out these medieval hangovers in most cases, yet such laws prohibited encroachments on neighboring properties. Attempts by landlords ("patroons" in New York) and others to settle peasant tenants tied to them by feudal dues largely failed. Married women could not own land; widows could, however, though often the male head would will property to his sons. As in many parts of Europe, in older settled areas where further division of a holding would jeopardize economic viability, the property went to one son, usually the oldest, a practice known as primogeniture.

Despite widespread landownership as the 18th century progressed, an increasing number of rural dwellers became tenants. Some tenant farmers in Pennsylvania were quite affluent because they occupied good, productive land; they seem to have reasoned that it was better to rent good land than own poor or more remote lands. Then too there were "inmates," the hired hands. Usually married, inmates lived with their families in a house on a plot of land that the owner granted them for use. In Maryland poor renters occupied the colony's own lands. Unmarried and married indentured servants resided in the households of sponsors of their overseas passage, but at the end of their term of service, probably few had been able to save enough money to buy land except in remote areas farther west. Sons of poorer owners, in New England and elsewhere, often worked as day laborers,

and they too could move west and succeed on the land if they had the energy and enough capital to buy equipment and supplies. Another way to gain ownership was to trespass ("squat") on lands held by a very large landowner who held back tracts in the expectation of appreciated value. Seven years of occupation might confer title on the squatter. Needless to say, slaves, even when freed, had difficulty acquiring title to land. Although the image of a freehold paradise is marred by the great many tenants, laborers, and slaves, the belief (and in large measure the reality) generally was that, compared to Europe, owning land was widespread.

In the 18th century, as today, land was a commodity that could be bought and sold. Although many men willed their holdings to children, many others chose to sell when they saw opportunity elsewhere. Prices rose through the century on land adjacent to cities and where the soil quality was good. Leases were defined in money terms and often identified other obligations to the owner. When prices of goods dropped to low levels, farmers fell into debt, and not a few holdings passed to the hands of the sheriff and were sold at auction. At times groups of farmers protested collectively, but usually to little avail. The power of the state in maintaining property relations prevailed.

A family farmstead was composed of a house, barn, and other outbuildings, such as a chicken coop, piggery, smokehouse, bake oven, and springhouse for cooling. Some households added a separate apartment or rooms to the house for retired parents. On southern plantations owners built slave quarters and workshops for blacksmithing and other craft work. In the North, too, some built distilleries, cider presses, and weaving shops. Farmers divided the land into gardens and orchards, upland for crops, and moister meadows for hay and rough pasture; they usually retained some uncleared woodland. Even though land was increasingly viewed as a commodity, it continued as the chief means of sustenance.

Farmsteads connected to the local communities. Their lanes gave access to local public roads that in turn joined main regional routes. Farmers hauled their goods in wagons or carts, and for personal transport the more affluent drove carriages. A church or meetinghouse, a mill, a store, and an inn with a tavern were seldom far away, and sometimes these services were clustered in small urban places.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: TOWNSHIPS AND COUNTIES

Farm families were citizens of minor civil divisions variously called townships, towns, hundreds, or parishes. Several townships together constituted counties (or, in South Carolina, parishes). Names were assigned by provincial officials, land developers, or the collective decisions of the first settlers. These names—whether harking back to the homeland, a saint, or the Bible or inherited from the aboriginal peoples—have persisted down to the present. Even though property was held freehold, no one could escape the institutional reality of living within a landscape organized by government. Every freeholder and many tenants had to pay taxes for local purposes, though these were very light by European standards. Male property holders, listed on tax rolls, elected their officials.

The size and shape of minor civil units and counties varied considerably, as did the terminology defining officials. When population densities rose, townships and counties were split into what residents and officials deemed to be more manageable units. Even so, northern counties remained larger than those in the South: 15,000 to 25,000 people in the 1770s compared to 5,000 (whites). In the Chesapeake tidewater region, for example, counties were only a quarter to a third the size of those farther north. Boundaries, like those of farm holdings, sometimes were arbitrary straight lines, but in more cases surveyors followed topographic features such as streams or lines of hills.

By 1700 provincial legislatures and councils had generally defined local and county powers, though the new colony of Pennsylvania still was experimenting, as some older ones had done earlier. The customary view of the division of powers between the lower level and the counties holds that in New England the town predominated, in the South the county, and in the Middle Colonies it was balanced. But such distinctions were not quite so sharp. The lower levels operated everywhere. In Pennsylvania an increasingly larger role emerged for township officials such as constables, overseers of the poor, road supervisors, fence viewers, and poundkeepers. But their power was circumscribed by limited taxing power. That local positions rotated among men suggests not only local, relatively egalitarian democracy, as in New England,

but also that these positions were seen more as obligations and less as paths to higher status, as in the case of more sought-after county and provincial offices. As in New England, Pennsylvania township meetings elected officials and also nominated candidates for constables, who were then appointed by county justices. In New England, counties gradually became more important, as interactions intensified. County courts would quicken their activities in civil suits as well as criminal cases.

In the North male property holders elected some county officials, while provincial authorities appointed others—notably justices, who were the most powerful men in counties. Keeping public order was paramount: for instance, trying persons for criminal acts or resolving disputes over lot boundaries through civil suits. Male citizens sat on juries. Other officials kept records in courthouses regarding deeds and wills and other relevant matters of the public interest. In all colonies, as today, representatives to the legislatures assumed considerable influence over local and county affairs. Indeed, provincial governments had near sovereign constitutional power over the lower levels.

In the South the much smaller tidewater counties took on more local power than in the North. In Maryland, parishes, only created in 1692, were apparently not very important, because in 1776 revolutionary fervor abolished them. In Virginia, although counties were even smaller than in Maryland, parishes retained only a few functions, notably to raise money for clergy of the established Church of England. One of the more intersting secular obligations of the vestry of the parish was "land processing." Because inaccurate surveys had led to so many lawsuits, the provincial assembly ordered vestries to view property lines and renew markers every four years.

Local Community Bodies and Networks

Church congregations also provided social cement at the local level. But as in England, denominational preferences divided people, and theological disputes within congregations sometimes split neighbors. By 1700 more than one congregation operated in many local communities. Such was the case even in New England, where the Congregational churches arising from Puritanism had been established officially by provincial authorities, or again in Virginia and Maryland where the Church of England was the established denomination. Local congregations selected stalwart members to represent them at regional conclaves, mostly organized in hierarchical structures. Pennsylvania Quakers, for example, held monthly meetings for representatives from several local congregations and yearly meetings at Philadelphia.

The importance of other local rural institutions is hard to measure. Kinship ties were perhaps the strongest social glue, though mobility loosened bonds. Schools were still not mandated, though some provinces encouraged them. Often clergymen would attempt to teach children in a schoolhouse on land donated by a local farmer and erected by a group of interested parents. Urban schools catered to the children of the elite, though a few served poor immigrant children as well. Most learning of skills occurred at home.

Local trading and work patterns were not only for economic benefit but also brought people together socially, often across town and county lines. Barn raisings, quilting bees, and husking bees did not, however, bring out everyone in a neighborhood. Taverns were gathering places for some men; others created clubs; women created networks. Celebrations certainly were crucial for social cohesion. Funerals were as important as weddings and baptisms in bringing kin and neighbors together. These were occasions to discuss the problems presented by the weather, politicians, and merchants and, of course, to gossip.

Whatever the variations, the workings of local government and other ventures in each colony were basically the same, with the exception of relations to slaves. In fact, 18th-century Americans behaved in many respects like the British, and some scholars have argued that institutions became more Anglicized over the century. That case should not be surprising. Most new social situations involve experimentation, but once society is established, the usual ways of doing things will impose themselves. As in every community, some people were outsiders, some fell into poverty, and others climbed the social ladder.

Inheriting property was the surest way to affluence, and in this respect the American colonies were less like Britain. Given wider property ownership, deference to authorities in

rural areas was weaker. In the North at least, at the local level, democracy prevailed more vigorously than in Britain. That would be America's greatest strength but also its greatest weakness. Social leveling did not stop some colonists from becoming richer than others, and, in the end, a class structure intensified in rural American communities. Without lords of the manor, against which people could clearly measure status, the distinctions were more subtle but in a sense more dangerous, as Alexis de Tocqueville warned Americans in the 1830s. In this most liberal of democracies, eventually the United States would show itself as the most inegalitarian country in the rich western world. It would have the greatest gap between rich and poor and would record the lowest voter turnouts because of a widespread sense that efforts to reduce such inequalities would be futile.

Higher Authorities

Everyone from Massachusetts to Georgia belonged to a province and also to Britain. Elective legislative assemblies represented their constituents. In many colonies, newer settled areas were underrepresented compared to older ones. This situation led to sectional tensions, based on a clash of interests. Nonetheless, enough unity of purpose within and among the colonies fueled opposition to Britain. Not long before 1700 the New England colonies, New York, and Maryland came under the direct rule of royally appointed governors, and New Jersey and the Carolinas would soon follow. Pennsylvania remained a proprietary province up to 1776. Georgia was a Crown colony, though in its early years James Oglethorpe, the driving force behind its establishment, chaired the board of trustees that administered the colony. While the governors (even those appointed by proprietors) and their executive councils were responsible to the Crown and Parliament overseas, the elective assemblies were run by colonial leaders, usually of elite economic status. Tensions between governors and legislatures were frequent, partly because information, often having to do with power, took weeks to cross the Atlantic and partly because of different aims. Not surprisingly, misunderstandings occurred, culminating finally in independence. The defeat of the French in Quebec, Acadia, and the West Indies in 1759 removed a major factor in colonists' commitment to the Union Jack.

Colonial representation in the House of Commons in London might have headed off separation. As Britain, like America, moved haltingly toward wider representative government, it was not clear to enough people of authority in Britain how to reach a more democratic way of governing their overseas kinfolk. We need only to look to Canada, where it took from 1791 to 1931 (even 1982) to work out an acceptable system of self-government under the Crown. But most people in America could not wait, and in 1783, 13 colonies became states in a new union. The seemingly arbitrary boundaries of independence remained where they had been laid down, mostly early in the 17th century. No one would try to change state boundaries today, or for that matter many lower level ones either. Such is the power of inertia and the hold of place definitions. ***

Urban Development and Regional Organization

Boston, New York, and Philadelphia dated from the first days of their respective colonies, and each apparently had more than enough inertia and organizational capacity to serve as the focus for its region, even as rural growth outpaced urban. But rural population and economic growth induced the founding of more urban places, as perceptive promoters recognized the opportunities to service the increasing population. A hierarchy of towns—"central places" in geographers' terminology—was more obvious in all colonies in 1775 than it had been a century earlier. Larger places served larger regions and thus were few in number. The smaller the place, the narrower the range of services and the more limited its surrounding hinterland. Although some promoters had pretensions of greatness for their urban developments, few places could actually grow large. In general, population size reflected the importance of functions.

Colonial promoters established capitals as the seat of government for maintaining public order, facilitating commerce and trade, and focusing colonial social life. By 1700 Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Newport, and Charleston were well established as the main centers (fig. 6.1). All were seaports tied to London, the dominant political, economic, and social provider of power. They can be called net-

1759 - defeat of French

1700 - capitals all tied to London

work cities, connecting to the Atlantic world of trade and communication. Still, only Boston exceeded 5,000 persons. On Chesapeake Bay no large center appeared, the capitals of Maryland and Virginia being tiny. By 1775 Philadelphia and New York both had grown to about 25,000, equivalent to several provincial cities in the British Isles. They were followed by Boston, which, at 16,000, had stagnated since 1740; then came Charleston (12,000), Newport (11,000), and two new cities—Norfolk and Baltimore—each at 6,000. And there were now many more smaller places.

Philadelphia and its region provides the most comprehensive pattern of urbanization, the one closest to what central place theory proposes (fig. 6.4). In 1681 William Penn and his officials established the town site coincidentally with the founding of the province. Government operations, such as the provincial courts, the land office, and regulatory bodies, provided jobs there and, in turn, multiplied other occupations to supply them with goods and services. More lawyers clustered there than anywhere else. Merchants settled in town from the beginning and dealt with fur traders, inland shopkeepers, millers, and farmers. Those with sufficient capital built wharves and, in time, operated ships on the Atlantic. These ships, supplied with food from the Philadelphia region, exported produce to the West Indies and southern Europe and, in competition with British vessels, brought imports from Britain and the West Indies. Success led to shipbuilding that exceeded production in Boston. Skilled and unskilled employment rose with expansion; small-scale manufacturing grew.

Philadelphia became the premier printing and publishing center in the colonies. Benjamin Franklin was one of the earliest and most famous of these publishers, one of a handful of leading men who had power to shape society. For many years the leaders met primarily in the London Coffee House at the central waterfront, where ships landed from Britain. Reports of the latest military and political exploits and the dispensing of prices and fashions from the center of empire were of utmost importance to these regional leaders. By midcentury, Philadelphia had risen to the top among the larger cities on the continent; New York was nearly as large, because of the

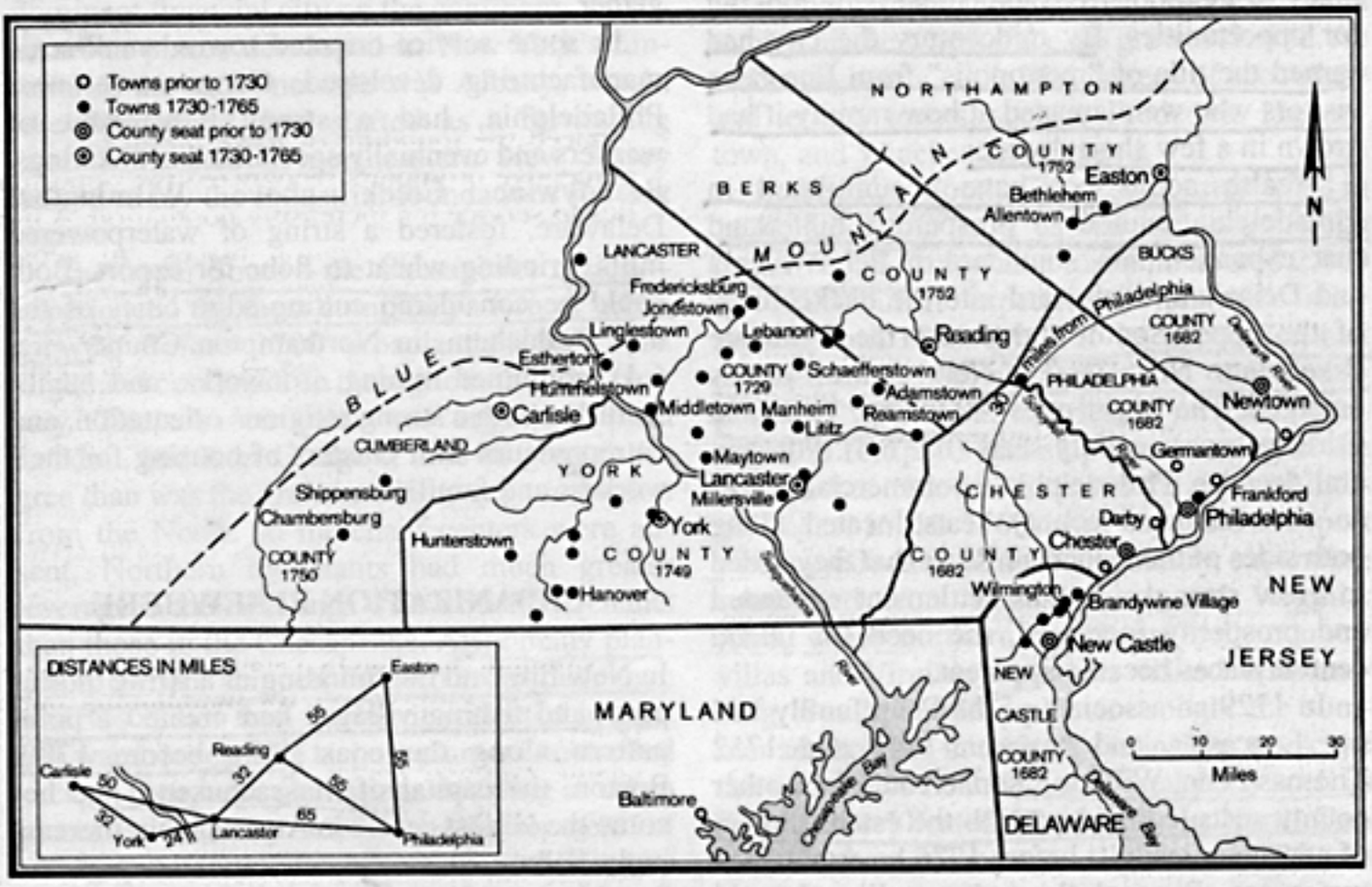

Figure 6.4 Urbanization in Southeastern Pennsylvania, 1652–1765 (after Lemon)