



SECTION 2

New England and the Middle Colonies

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

In New England and the Middle Colonies, a diverse economy supported many large port cities.

Key Terms and Names

Grand Banks, fall line, town meeting, selectmen, meetinghouse, bill of exchange, triangular trade, artisan, entrepreneur, capitalist

Reading Strategy

Categorizing As you read about New England and the Middle Colonies, complete a chart similar to the one below describing how resources affected economic development.

Resources	Industries
Sea	

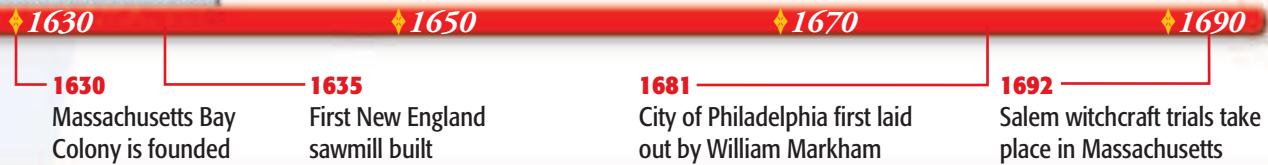
Reading Objectives

- List the geographical conditions that determined the economy of the New England Colonies.
- Summarize how life in the Middle Colonies differed from life in the New England Colonies.

Section Theme

Culture and Traditions The culture of the New England Colonies developed differently from that of the Southern Colonies.

Preview of Events



★ An American Story ★

New England's soil was thin and rocky, and from the earliest days, many settlers knew they would have to depend on the sea for their livelihood. Although some people back in England believed New England offered only a meager existence, the Reverend Francis Higginson learned otherwise. One of New England's earliest settlers, Higginson here describes the rich fishing off the coast of New England:

¶ I saw great store of whales and grampus, and such abundance of mackerels that it would astonish one to behold. . . . There is a fish called a bass, a most sweet and wholesome fish as ever I did eat. . . . Of this fish our fishers may take many hundreds together, which I have seen lying on the shore, to my admiration. Yea, their nets ordinarily take more than they are able to haul to land. . . . And besides bass, we take plenty of skate and thornback, and abundance of lobsters; and the least boy in the plantation may both catch and eat what he will of them. ¶



New England port

—from “On the Riches of New England,” *The Annals of America*

New England’s Economy

Although the fishing industry made few New Englanders rich, it did provide a living for many settlers who built ships or engaged in foreign trade. Farther inland, numerous small farms, sawmills, and other industries helped to create a very diverse economy in New England.



NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

Economy of the Northern and Middle Colonies, 1750



Geography Skills

- Interpreting Maps** What products were produced in the Pennsylvania colony?
- Applying Geography Skills** Why do you think iron mills were located beside rivers?

None of the crops that could be grown in New England were in great demand elsewhere. The region's unsuitability for cash crops prevented the development of large plantations. Instead, on small farms that dotted the New England landscape from Connecticut to Maine, New England farmers practiced subsistence farming, using nearly everything they produced.

Although New England farmers tried to grow wheat, in most places the soil was too poor, and the presence of a fungus called black rust prevented any real success during the colonial era. As a result, the main crop grown in colonial New England was corn.

Corn had a short growing season, and its long taproot allowed it to grow well even in New England's rocky soil. As New England became more settled, farmers began to grow barley, oats, and rye, as well as many types of vegetables, including beans, peas, pumpkins, squash, and turnips. Most farms also included orchards. Apple trees were common because apples could be used for cider or dried to feed livestock in the winter. Farmers also made use of berries, particularly cranberries, blackberries, and strawberries, which grew wild throughout New England.

New England farmers also raised livestock. They used oxen to pull plows and wagons and used horses for travel. Dairy cattle provided milk for butter and cheese, and sheep provided wool. Pigs supplied meat, and salted pork was a common source of protein during the long winter months.

GEOGRAPHY

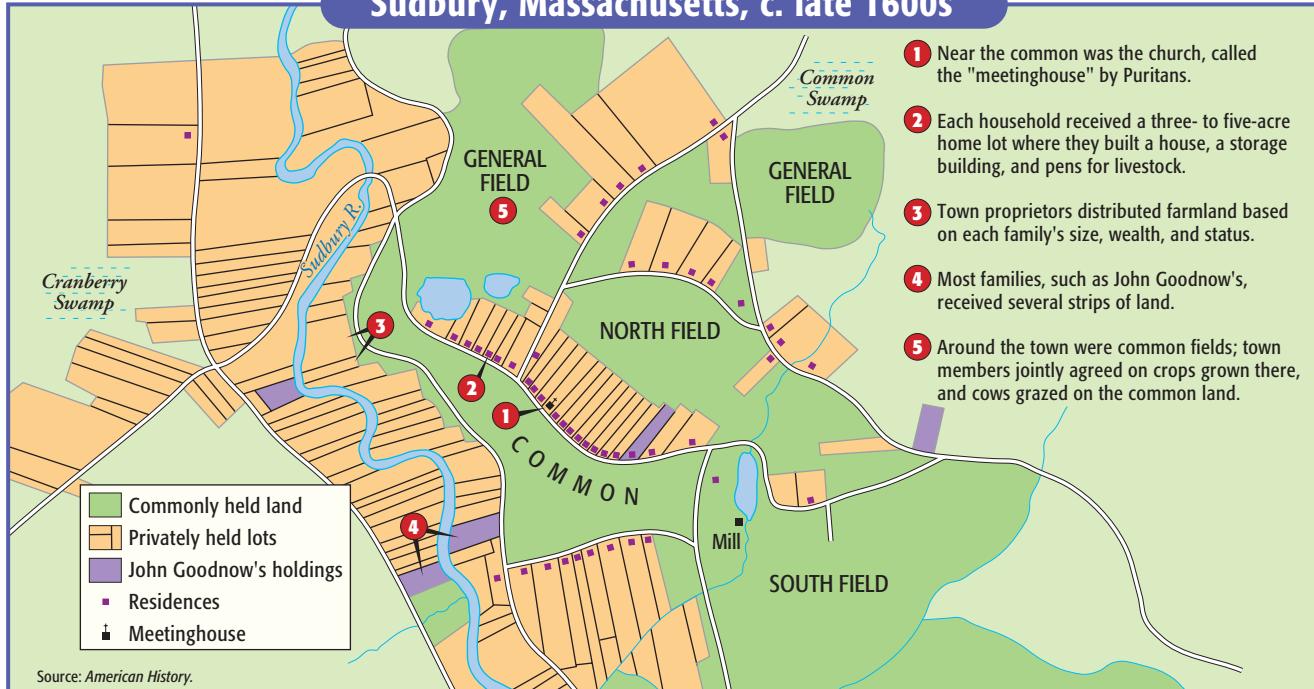
Fishing and Whaling The geography of New England almost guaranteed that fishing would become a major industry in the region. Northeast of New England lay the **Grand Banks**, a shallow region in the Atlantic Ocean where the mixing of the warm Gulf Stream and the cold North Atlantic produced an environment favorable to plankton—an important food supply for many types of fish and whales. In the colonial era the Grand Banks teemed with fish, including cod, mackerel, halibut, and herring.

At the same time, New England's coastline had many good harbors and plenty of timber for building fishing boats. There was a great demand for fish, as it was an important source of nutrition in the colonies, southern Europe, and the Caribbean. Fishing, more than any other industry, brought prosperity to New England. Nearly every coastal town had a fishing fleet. In the early 1700s, an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 people in New England made their living by fishing.

Whaling also played a major role in New England's economy, especially for people living on Nantucket Island and in Provincetown at the end of Cape Cod. Whalers sought their prey for its blubber, used for making candles and lamp oil; ambergris, a waxy intestinal substance used to make perfume; and bones, used for buttons and combs and as supports in women's clothing.



Sudbury, Massachusetts, c. late 1600s



Picturing History

Sudbury, Massachusetts The town was the basic unit of community life in New England in the 1600s. Houses were laid out around a central pasture called a common. In this map, the holdings of one man, John Goodnow, are highlighted in purple to show the way each person's land holdings could be scattered about the town. [Who decided how much land each person received?](#)

Lumbering and Shipbuilding Dense forest covered much of North America's eastern coastline in the 1600s. Although settlers relied on wood from these forests in every colony, New England's geography—particularly in Maine and New Hampshire—provided the conditions necessary for the development of a lumber industry.

In New England the **fall line**—the area where rivers descend from a high elevation to a lower one, causing waterfalls—is near the coast. Waterfalls were used to power sawmills. The first sawmill in the colonies was probably built in New Hampshire in 1635. Others soon followed. Lumber cut at these sawmills could easily be transported downriver to the coast and shipped to other colonies or to England.

Every colony needed lumber. Colonists wanted walnut, maple, and sycamore wood for furniture. They used cedar for doorframes and windowsills. Maple was made into spinning wheels. Oak and pine provided materials for boards, shingles, and barrel staves. Barrel making was a very important industry in the colonies because barrels were used to store and ship almost everything. Coopers in the colonial era made between 300,000 and 400,000 barrels per year. The lumber industry also made possible another important industry in New England—shipbuilding.

With forests and sawmills close to the coast, ships could be built quickly and cheaply. The large fishing industry and the growing trade between New England and the other colonies created a steady demand for ships. English merchants purchased many ships from the colonies because the ships could be built for 30 to 50 percent less in America than in England. By the 1770s, one out of every three English ships had been built in America.

Reading Check Summarizing How did geography shape New England's industries?

Life in New England's Towns

If self-sufficient plantations defined the social organization in the South, Puritan New England's social life centered on the town. Puritans believed that God had entered into a covenant—or solemn contract—with human beings that enabled them to obtain salvation. As a result they also believed that groups of Christians should come together to form church covenants—voluntary agreements to worship together.

The commitment to church covenants encouraged the development of towns. Instead of granting land to individuals, the general courts in the New



England Colonies granted land to groups of people, who then became the town proprietors. The town proprietors were usually prominent members of a congregation that wanted to establish a new community. The town became the heart of New England society. It determined how the land was settled and how the people were governed.

GOVERNMENT

Town Meetings Town residents met to discuss local problems and issues. Free men in the towns elected leaders and chose deputies to go to the General Court of their colony. These **town meetings** developed into the local town government. Although anyone in the town could attend a town meeting and express an opinion, voting was limited to men who had been granted land by the town. As town meetings became more frequent, the men began to pass laws for the town and to elect officials.

The men chosen to manage the town's affairs were called **selectmen**, and they were elected annually. The selectmen appointed any other officials the town needed, such as clerks, constables, and justices of the peace. Town meetings were very important. Unlike farmers in England, the settlers in New England were allowed to directly participate in their own local government. They developed a strong belief that they had the right to govern themselves. Town meetings helped set the stage for the American Revolution and the emergence of democratic government.

Salem and Witchcraft

Devout Puritans in the late 1600s firmly believed that Satan used witches to work evil in the world. In 1692 accusations of witchcraft resulted in the execution of 20 residents of Salem, Massachusetts.

Salem's witch trials began when a group of teenage girls accused an African servant of being a witch. Their accusations soon grew to include others, including some prominent people in town. Accused witches were often spared if they confessed, especially if they pointed a finger at other community members.

Some people who denied being witches were hanged. Only after the Salem witchcraft trials ended in 1692 did the original accusers admit that they had made up the entire story. The incident may have reflected community strains and resentments. The accusers tended to be less successful people who clung to Salem's agricultural roots. Many of those accused of witchcraft were prosperous and associated with the town's seaport.

Puritan Society The Puritans' houses were located close to the church, or **meetinghouse**, and so they could never claim distance as an excuse to miss Sunday worship, sermons, and Thursday night religious lectures. These sermons and lectures reinforced the Puritans' obedience to strict rules regulating most activities of daily life. Puritan law banned "Those infamous Games of Cards and Dice because of the lottery which is in them." Puritans also frowned upon "Stage-Players and Mixed Dancing."

Puritans also felt a sense of responsibility for the moral welfare of their neighbors. Watching over their neighbors' behavior was elevated to a religious duty, which Puritans termed "Holy Watching," or "doing the Lord's work."

Although the Puritans have acquired a reputation for being intolerant and rigidly moral, they were not opposed to everything that was fun and pleasurable. Puritans drank rum, enjoyed music, and liked to wear brightly colored clothing that indicated their wealth and social position. They worked hard, and Puritan artisans and architects produced beautiful and elegant works. In the Puritan view, God had made the world, and the things in it were to be enjoyed by people. As one colonist wrote at the time, "In New England . . . the farmers live in the midst of a

The Salem witchcraft trials (below) led to several executions (right).





plenty of the necessities of life; they do not acquire wealth, but they have comforts in abundance."

Reading Check **Synthesizing** How did New England town meetings prepare the colonists for the future?

Trade and the Rise of Cities

In the early colonial era, New England produced few goods or crops that England wanted, but England produced many items that settlers wanted. Such items included hardware and various mechanical instruments, as well as fine cloth, linens, ceramic plates, and other luxury items. This situation, combined with New England's shipbuilding industry and good ports, encouraged some settlers to become merchants. The growth of trade in New England, in turn, led to the rise of cities along the coast.

Triangular Trade The only way colonial merchants could acquire the English goods that settlers wanted was to sell New England's products somewhere else in exchange for goods that England wanted. Fortunately, the sugar plantations in the Caribbean wanted to buy New England's fish, lumber, and meat.

To pay for the food and lumber from New England, Caribbean sugar planters would either trade raw sugar to the New England merchants or give them **bills of exchange**. Bills of exchange were credit slips English merchants gave the planters in exchange for their sugar. These bills worked as a kind of money. New England merchants would take the bills, as well as any sugar they had acquired, back home to New England and use them to buy English manufactured goods.

New England's trade with the sugar plantations of the Caribbean made many merchants very wealthy and led to new industries in New England. Using their new wealth, merchants in Northern cities built factories to refine raw sugar and distilleries to turn molasses into rum. Merchants also began trading with the Southern Colonies, exchanging Northern fish, rum, and grain for Southern rice, tobacco, and indigo.

The three-way trade New England merchants established with the Caribbean colonies and England is an example of **triangular trade**. Other three-way trade systems also existed. For example, New England merchants would trade rum to British merchants in exchange for British goods. British merchants then traded the rum to West Africans in exchange for enslaved Africans, who were then transported across the Atlantic to the Caribbean and traded for sugar.

A New Urban Society The rise of trade in the colonies caused several ports to grow rapidly into colonial America's first cities. By 1760 Philadelphia had over 23,000 people, making it the largest colonial city. Charles Town, South Carolina, with 8,000 people, was the largest city in the South. Within these cities and others, a new society developed with distinct social classes.

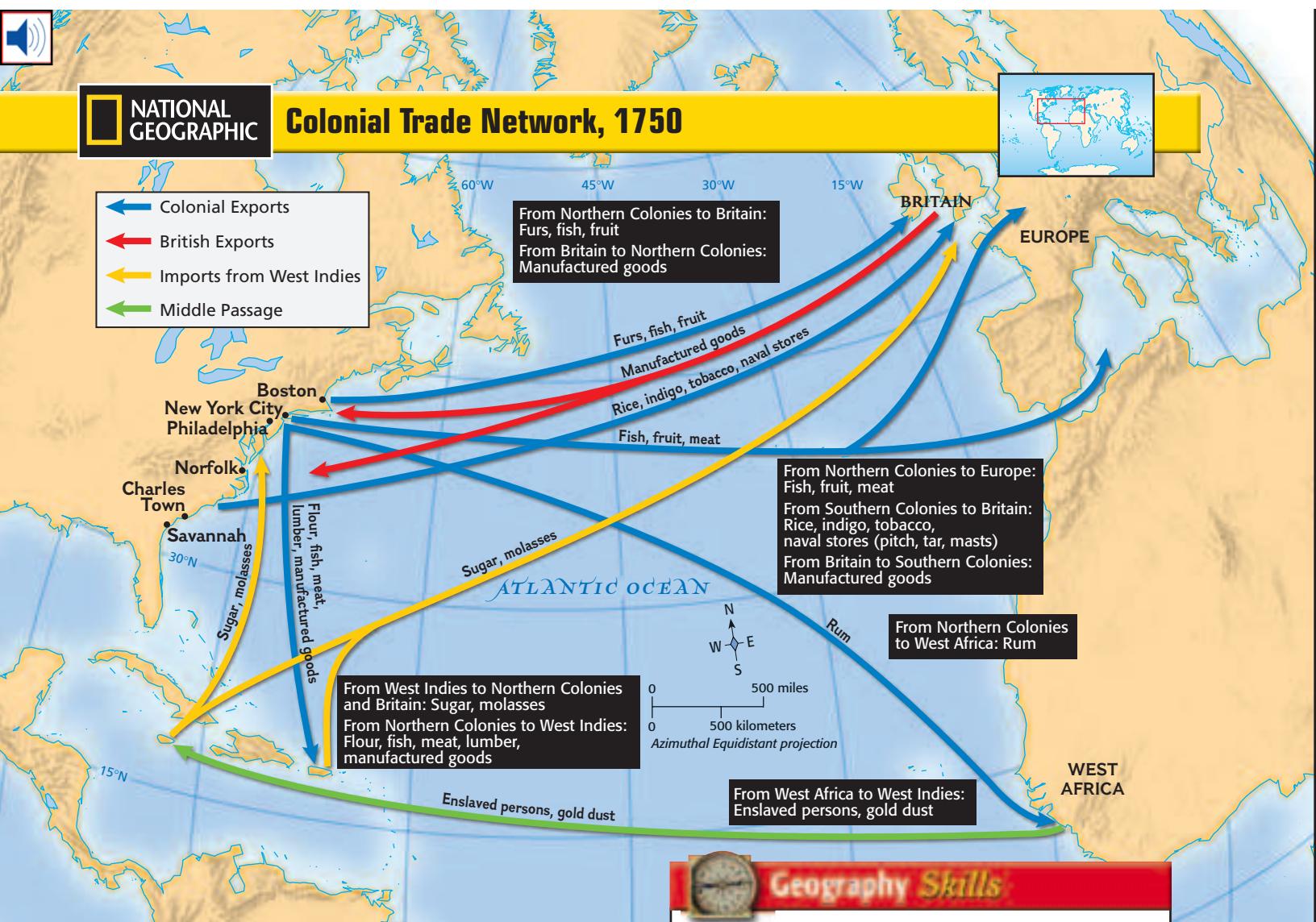
At the top of society were a small group of wealthy merchants who controlled the city's trade. The merchants in the coastal cities, in many ways similar to the planter elite in the South, patterned themselves after the British upper class. They wore elegant imported clothing, built luxurious mansions surrounded by gardens and maintained by servants, and rode through the crowded city streets in fancy carriages.

Although the merchants were the wealthiest people living in colonial cities, they were only a tiny minority. Artisans and their families made up nearly half of the urban population in colonial America. **Artisans** were skilled workers who knew how to manufacture various goods. They included carpenters, masons, coopers, iron and silversmiths, glassmakers, bakers, seamstresses, shoemakers, and many other tradespeople. Some artisans owned their own tools and shops, but most were employed in shops other people owned. Equal to the artisans in social status were innkeepers and retailers who owned their own places of business.

At the bottom of urban colonial society were the people without skills or property. Many of these people were employed at the harbor, where they loaded and serviced ships. Others worked as servants, washing clothes, grooming horses, cleaning houses, hauling garbage, and sweeping streets. These people made up about 30 percent of urban society during the colonial period. Below them in status were indentured servants and enslaved Africans. Enslaved Africans composed between 10 and 20 percent of the urban population. They too served as manual laborers and servants for the city's wealthier inhabitants.

The rapid development of cities created many problems, including overcrowding, crime, pollution, and epidemics. To deal with these problems, city governments established specific departments and offices. Constables' offices provided residents with some protection from crime. Charities began to address the problems of the urban poor, whose numbers swelled whenever a recession caused trade to decline.

Reading Check **Examining** What new social classes developed in the Northern Colonies, and what contributed to their development?



Society in the Middle Colonies

The Middle Colonies—Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware—contained some of the most fertile farmland in North America. Unlike the subsistence farmers in New England, most farmers in the Middle Colonies were able to produce a surplus that they could sell. The rich soil of the region crumbled easily under their plows, and the longer growing season enabled them to bring forth bumper crops of rye, oats, barley, and potatoes. The most important crop, however, was wheat, which quickly became the region's main cash crop.

The Growth of the Middle Colonies Merchants based in the Middle Colonies rapidly duplicated the success of the New England merchants and began selling wheat and flour to the colonies in the Caribbean. The Middle Colonies also benefited from their geography. Unlike New England, the Middle Colonies had three wide rivers—the Hudson, the Delaware, and the Susquehanna—that ran deep into the interior. These rivers made it easy for farmers

Geography Skills

- Interpreting Maps** What commodity was shipped from the colonies to West Africa?
- Applying Geography Skills** In what sequence was rum produced and shipped to markets?

to move their goods to the coast for shipping to markets elsewhere in America and Europe.

Hundreds of small ships sailed up and down the region's rivers, exchanging European goods for barrels of wheat and flour. At the same time, thousands of wagons moved goods overland from interior farms to river towns, where they could be loaded on ships and moved downriver. As might be expected, towns located where the rivers emptied into the Atlantic Ocean rapidly grew into major cities. The prosperity of the Middle Colonies enabled New York City and Philadelphia to become the two largest cities in the British colonies.

The Wheat Boom In the early 1700s, Europe's climate began to get warmer just as the diseases there began to decline. The result was a population explosion and a flood of new immigrants into



America—particularly into the Middle Colonies, where land was still available. At the same time, this population explosion created a huge demand for wheat to feed the soaring number of people in Europe. Between 1720 and 1770, wheat prices more than doubled in the colonies. This brought a surge of prosperity to the Middle Colonies.

The rapid rise of the wheat trade and the arrival of so many new settlers changed the society of the Middle Colonies. Some farmers became very wealthy by hiring poor immigrants to work on their farms for wages. This enabled them to raise large amounts of wheat for sale. Other colonists became wealthy as **entrepreneurs**, or businesspeople who risked their money by buying land, equipment, and supplies and then selling them to the new immigrants for a profit.

One of the reasons the American colonies had few industries and had to import so many manufactured goods from England was that the British government limited manufacturing in the colonies. Money to invest in factories was also scarce. The wheat boom created a new group of **capitalists**, people who had money to invest in new businesses. Industry did not develop on a large scale during the colonial era, but these early capitalists did build large gristmills near New York and Philadelphia that produced tens of thousands of barrels of flour for export. Other early entrepreneurs in the Middle Colonies established glass and pottery works.

Although many farmers prospered from growing wheat, very few became wealthy, primarily because of the limited technology of the time. There were no mechanical harvesters, so all of the wheat had to be cut by hand using a sickle. Threshing, or separating the grain from the chaff, also had to be done by hand



History Through Art

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania This painting of a town in the Middle Colonies represents a typical layout of that region of colonial America. **What was the main cash crop in the Middle Colonies?**

by beating the grain with a wooden flail. Using sickles, most farm families could harvest no more than 15 acres of wheat in a season. This was enough to produce a small surplus, but not enough to make most farmers rich. Only those farmers who were able to hire workers or who had extra land that they could rent to tenant farmers became wealthy.

As a result, distinct classes developed in the Middle Colonies, as they did in the other regions. At the top were wealthy entrepreneurs who owned large farms and other businesses. In the middle were many farmers who owned only a few acres and could generate a small surplus from their land. At the bottom of society were landless workers, who either rented land from large landowners or worked for wages.

Reading Check Explaining Why did the colonies experience a population boom in the early 1700s?

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

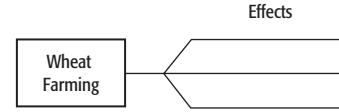
- Define:** town meeting, selectmen, bill of exchange, triangular trade, artisan, entrepreneur, capitalist.
- Identify:** Grand Banks, fall line, meetinghouse.
- Describe** the different social classes in New England and the Middle Colonies.

Reviewing Themes

- Culture and Traditions** How did Puritanism affect the development of New England society and government?

Critical Thinking

- Understanding Cause and Effect** How did the geography of the New England and Middle Colonies contribute to their economic development?
- Categorizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to show the effects of wheat farming on the Middle Colonies.



Analyzing Visuals

- Examining Maps** Study the map of a New England town on page 93. Would the practice of "Holy Watching" have been easy to do in this town? Why or why not?

Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Imagine that you are barrel maker in the New England Colonies. Write a letter to a government official stating the problems you have that you want the government to address.