

The Thirteen Colonies

The first Europeans to arrive in North America were likely the Norse, traveling west from Greenland, where Erik the Red had founded a settlement around the year 985. In 1001 his son Leif is thought to have explored the northeast coast of what is now Canada and spent at least one winter there.

While Norse sagas suggest that Viking sailors explored the Atlantic coast of North America down as far as the Bahamas, such claims remain unproven. In 1963, however, the ruins of some Norse houses dating from that era were discovered at L'Anse-aux-Meadows in northern Newfoundland, thus supporting at least some of the claims the Norse sagas make.

In 1497, just five years after Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean looking for a western route to Asia, a Venetian sailor named John Cabot arrived in Newfoundland on a mission for the British king.

Cabot's journey was later to provide the basis for British claims to North America. It also opened the way to the rich fishing grounds off George's Banks, to which European fishermen, particularly the Portuguese, were soon making regular visits.

Columbus (who was looking for a new route to India, China, Japan and the 'Spice Islands' of Indonesia to bring back cargoes of silk and spices (ginger turmeric and cinnamon)) never saw the mainland United States, but the first explorations of the continental United States were launched from the Spanish possessions that he helped establish. The first of these took place in 1513 when a group of men under Juan Ponce de Leon landed on the Florida coast near the present city of St. Augustine.



John Cabot

With the conquest of Mexico in 1522, the Spanish further solidified their position in the Western Hemisphere. The ensuing discoveries added to Europe's knowledge of what was now named America - after the Italian Amerigo Vespucci, who wrote a widely popular account of his voyages to a "New World."

By 1529 reliable maps of the Atlantic coastline from Labrador to Tierra del Fuego had been drawn up, although it would take more than another century before hope of discovering a "Northwest Passage" to Asia would be completely abandoned.

Among the most significant early Spanish explorations was that of Hernando De Soto, a veteran conquistador who had accompanied Francisco Pizarro during the conquest of Peru. Leaving Havana in 1539, De Soto's expedition landed in Florida and ranged through the southeastern United States as far as the Mississippi River in search of riches.

Another Spaniard, Francisco Coronado, set out from Mexico in 1540 in search of the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola. Coronado's travels took him to the Grand Canyon and Kansas, but failed to reveal the gold or treasure his men sought.

However, Coronado's party did leave the peoples of the region a remarkable, if unintended gift: enough horses escaped from his party to transform life on the Great Plains. Within a few generations, the Plains Indians had become masters of horsemanship, greatly expanding the range and scope of their activities.

While the Spanish were pushing up from the south, the northern portion of the present-day United States was slowly being revealed through the journeys of men such as Giovanni da Verrazano. A Florentine who sailed for the French, Verrazano made landfall in North Carolina in 1524, then sailed north along the Atlantic coast past what is now New York harbor.

A decade later, the Frenchman Jacques Cartier set sail with the hope - like the other Europeans before him - of finding a sea passage to Asia. Cartier's expeditions along the St. Lawrence River laid the foundations for the French claims to North America, which were to last until 1763.

Following the collapse of their first Quebec colony in the 1540s, French Huguenots attempted to settle the northern coast of Florida two decades later. The Spanish, viewing the French as a threat to their trade route along the Gulf Stream, destroyed the colony in 1565.

Ironically, the leader of the Spanish forces, Pedro Menendez, would soon establish a town not far away - St. Augustine. It was the first permanent European settlement in what would become the United States.

The great wealth which poured into Spain from the colonies in Mexico, the Caribbean and Peru provoked great interest on the part of the other European powers. With time, emerging maritime nations such as England, drawn in part by Francis Drake's successful raids on Spanish treasure ships, began to take interest in the New World.

The British Look to New World

In 1578 Humphrey Gilbert, the author of a treatise on the search for the Northwest Passage, received a patent from Queen Elizabeth to colonize the "heathen and barbarous landes" in the New World which other European nations had not yet claimed. It would be five years before his efforts could begin. When he was lost at sea, his half-brother, Walter Raleigh, took up the mission.

In 1585 Raleigh established the first British colony in North America with a group of colonists (91 men, 17 women and nine children) on Roanoke Island off the coast of North Carolina. The first act was to restore to their friends the two Indians who had been previously taken to England.

The colony was later abandoned. Sir Walter Raleigh fitted out another colony, which sailed in the spring of 1587; the second effort also proved a failure. Mysteriously, by 1590 the Roanoke colony had vanished entirely. Historians still do not know what became of its inhabitants.

The failure that attended all these efforts of the hopeful and energetic Raleigh was probably due, if not wholly, to the fact that he did not himself accompany and command any of his expeditions. And, the main reason that he did not go with the ships was, that he was a great favorite with Queen Elizabeth, and she was not willing to let him risk himself in such adventures. (Johnson)

British First Success at Jamestown

It would be 20 years before the British would try again. This time - at Jamestown in 1607 - the colony would succeed, and North America would enter a new era. (Alonzo L Hamby)

The early 1600s saw the beginning of a great tide of emigration from Europe to North America. Spanning more than three centuries, this movement grew from a trickle of a few hundred English colonists to a flood of millions of newcomers. Impelled by powerful and diverse motivations, they built a new civilization on the northern part of the continent.

Most European emigrants left their homelands to escape political oppression, to seek the freedom to practice their religion, or for adventure and opportunities denied them at home.

In 1606, King James I divided the Atlantic seaboard in two, giving the southern half to the London Company (later the Virginia Company) and the northern half to the Plymouth Company.

Just a few months after James I issued its charter, the London Company sent 144 men to Virginia on three ships: the Godspeed, the Discovery and the Susan Constant. They reached the Chesapeake Bay in the spring of 1607 and headed about 60 miles up the James River, where they built a settlement they called Jamestown.

The Jamestown colonists had a rough time of it: They were so busy looking for gold and other exportable resources that they could barely feed themselves. It was not until 1616, when Virginia's settlers learned how to grow tobacco, that it seemed the colony might survive. The first enslaved African arrived in Virginia in 1619.



Then, the first English emigrants to what would become the New England colonies were a small group of religious separatists, later called the Pilgrims, who arrived in Plymouth in 1620 on the Mayflower to found Plymouth Colony.

Ten years later, a wealthy syndicate known as the Massachusetts Bay Company sent a much larger (and more liberal) group of Puritans to establish another Massachusetts settlement. With the help of local natives, the colonists soon got the hang of farming, fishing and hunting, and Massachusetts prospered. As the Massachusetts settlements expanded, they generated new colonies in New England.



Between 1620 and 1635, economic difficulties swept England. Many people could not find work. Even skilled artisans could earn little more than a bare living. Poor crop yields added to the distress. In addition, the Industrial Revolution had created a burgeoning textile industry, which demanded an ever-increasing supply of wool to keep the looms running. Landlords enclosed farmlands and evicted the peasants in favor of sheep cultivation. Colonial expansion became an outlet for this displaced peasant population.

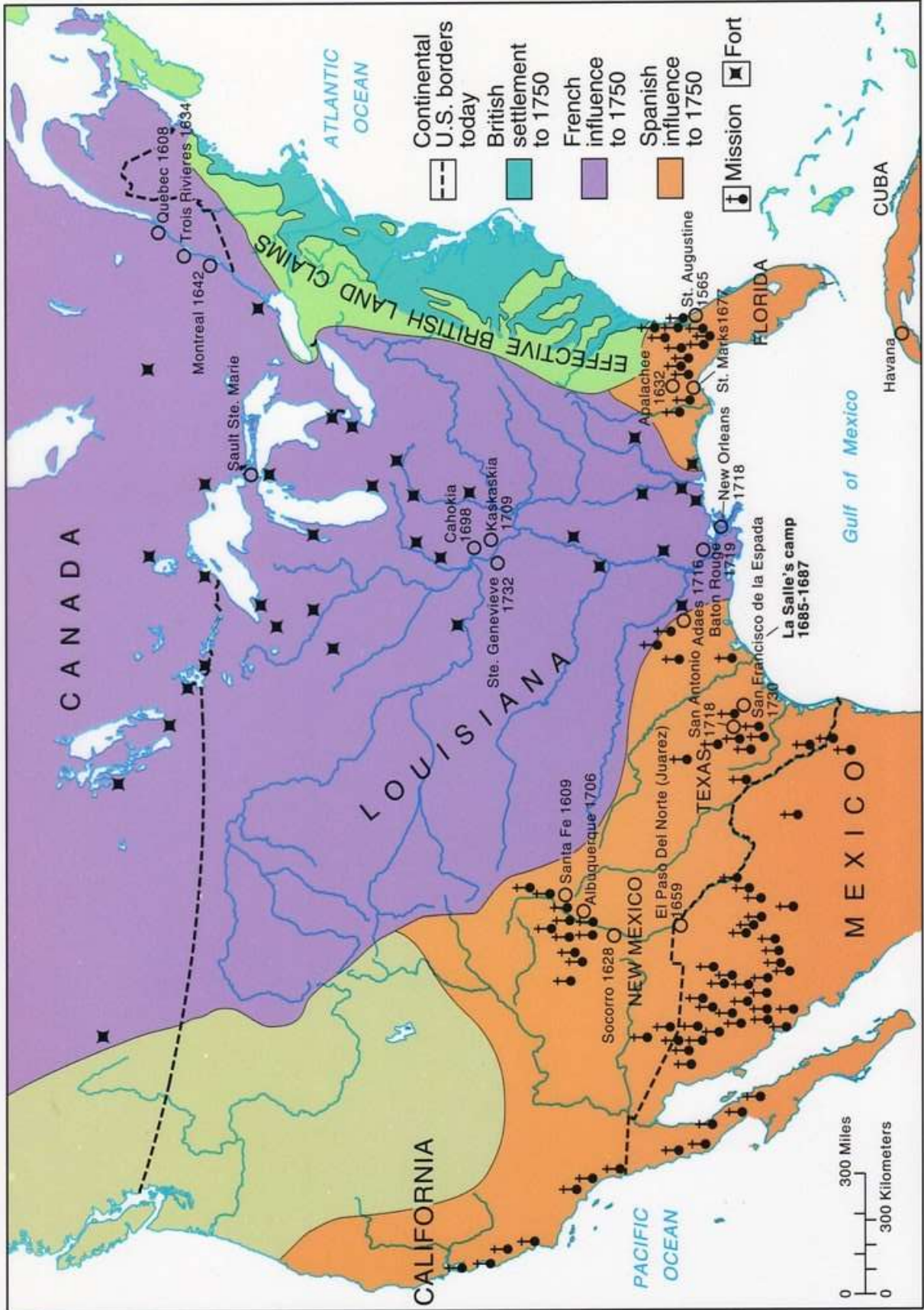
In 1632, the English crown granted about 12 million acres of land at the top of the Chesapeake Bay to Cecilius Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore. This colony, named Maryland, was similar to Virginia in many ways. Its landowners produced tobacco on large plantations that depended on the labor of indentured servants and (later) enslaved workers.

But unlike Virginia's founders, Lord Baltimore was a Catholic, and he hoped that his colony would be a refuge for his persecuted coreligionists. Maryland was known for its policy of religious tolerance for all.

Puritans who thought that Massachusetts was not pious enough formed the colonies of Connecticut and New Haven (the two combined in 1665). Meanwhile, Puritans who thought that Massachusetts was too restrictive formed the colony of Rhode Island, where everyone – including Jewish people – enjoyed complete “liberty in religious concerns.” To the north of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a handful of adventurous settlers formed the colony of New Hampshire.

In 1664, King Charles II gave the territory between New England and Virginia, much of which was already occupied by Dutch traders and landowners called patroons, to his brother James, the Duke of York. The English soon absorbed Dutch New Netherland and renamed it New York, but most of the Dutch people (as well as the Belgian Flemings and Walloons, French Huguenots, Scandinavians and Germans who were living there) stayed. This made New York one of the most diverse and prosperous colonies.

In 1680, the king granted 45,000 square miles of land west of the Delaware River to William Penn, a Quaker who owned large swaths of land in Ireland. Lured by the fertile soil and the religious toleration that Penn promised, people migrated there from all over Europe. Like their Puritan counterparts in New England, most of these emigrants paid their own way to the colonies and had enough money to establish themselves when they arrived. As a result, Pennsylvania soon became a prosperous place.



By contrast, the Carolina colony, a territory that stretched south from Virginia to Florida and west to the Pacific Ocean, was much less cosmopolitan. In its northern half, hardscrabble farmers eked out a living. In its southern half, planters presided over vast estates that produced corn, lumber, beef and pork, and, starting in the 1690s, rice.

These Carolinians had close ties to the English planter colony on the Caribbean island of Barbados, which relied heavily on African slave labor, and many were involved in the slave trade themselves. As a result, slavery played an important role in the development of the Carolina colony. (It split into North Carolina and South Carolina in 1729.)

In 1732, inspired by the need to build a buffer between South Carolina and the Spanish settlements in Florida, the Englishman James Oglethorpe established the Georgia colony. In many ways, Georgia's development mirrored South Carolina's.

By 1750, some 80 per cent of the North American continent was controlled or influenced by France or Spain. Their presence was a source of tension and paranoia among those in the 13 British colonies, who feared encirclement, invasion and the influence of Catholicism.

In 1700, there were about 250,000 European settlers and enslaved Africans in North America's English colonies. By 1775, on the eve of revolution, there were an estimated 2.5 million. The colonists did not have much in common, but they were able to band together and fight for their independence.

The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) was sparked after American colonists chafed over issues like taxation without representation, embodied by laws like The Stamp Act and The Townshend Acts. Mounting tensions came to a head during the Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, when the "shot heard round the world" was fired.

It was not without warning; the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770 and the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773 showed the colonists' increasing dissatisfaction with British rule in the colonies.

The Declaration of Independence, issued on July 4, 1776, enumerated the reasons the Founding Fathers felt compelled to break from the rule of King George III and parliament to start a new nation. In September of that year, the Continental Congress declared the "United Colonies" of America to be the "United States of America."

France joined the war on the side of the colonists in 1778, helping the Continental Army conquer the British at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. The Treaty of Paris ending the American Revolution and granting the 13 original colonies independence was signed on September 3, 1783. (History-com)

Here is a list of the thirteen colonies (now states) with the year they were founded and notes on who and how they were founded, and how they were named:

1. Virginia (1607) - John Smith and the London Company. This colony was named after Queen Elizabeth I, the "virgin queen" who married England instead of a husband. (West Virginia wasn't a separate state until 1861.)
2. New Hampshire (1623) - John Mason was the first land holder, later John Wheelwright. under the authority of an English land-grant, Captain John Mason, in conjunction with several others, sent David Thomson, a Scotsman, and Edward and Thomas Hilton, fish-merchants of London, with a

number of other people in two divisions to establish a fishing colony at the mouth of the Piscataqua River. Thus the settlement of New Hampshire did not happen because those who came were persecuted out of England. It was named by John Mason after the county of Hampshire in England (home of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens).

- Massachusetts (1630) - Puritans looking for religious freedom. It was named after an Algonquian tribe, the Massachusett, which translates to something along the lines of “people of the great hill” or “at the place of large hills,” referring to the famous Blue Hills southwest of Boston. (Plymouth Colony, formed in 1620 by the separatist Pilgrims seeking religious freedom, was absorbed into Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1691.)



4. Maryland (1633) - George and Cecil Calvert as a safe haven for Catholics who were persecuted in England. Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore, received a charter from Charles I of England and the colony was to be named after Charles' wife, Queen Henrietta Mary (she went by Queen Mary).
5. Connecticut (1636) - Thomas Hooker after he was told to leave Massachusetts. The Dutch were the first Europeans to reach Connecticut in 1614. But there were already Native Americans in what would become the Nutmeg State. The name Connecticut is derived from the Algonquian word "quinnehtukqut" that means "beside the long tidal river."
6. Rhode Island (1636) - Roger Williams to have a place of religious freedom for all. The official name was the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. The first mention of Rhode Island in writing was by Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano in the early 16th century. He referred to an island near the mouth of Narragansett Bay that he compared to the Island of Rhodes in the Mediterranean. Some suggest Dutch explorer Adrian Block named it "Roodt Eylandt" meaning "red island" in reference to the red clay that lined the shore. The name was later anglicized when the region came under British rule. And in 1636, Roger Williams was given some land at the top of Narragansett Bay by Indian chiefs Canonicus and Miantonomi. Williams decided to call the land "Providence Plantations" because he felt that God had guided him there. (In 2020, Rhode Island voters dropped the 'Providence Plantations' from its name.)
7. Delaware (1638) - Peter Minuit and the New Sweden Company. Dutch navigator Cornelis Jacobszoon May was provided a patent to explore the Delaware and Dutch trading posts were established up and down the Delaware Bay starting in 1620. The New Sweden Company was chartered and, in 1638, established The Colony of New Sweden at Fort Christina, in what is today Wilmington, Delaware. British took over in 1664. The bay, river, colony and now state were named in 1610 by English explorer Samuel Argall (1580-1626) in honor of Virginia's governor, Thomas West, Lord De La Warr.
8. North Carolina (1663) - Originally part of the Province of Carolina. First the French and then the Spanish tried to establish settlements on the coastal land. Beginning in 1712, there were separate and distinct governments of the northeastern and southwestern parts of Carolina, and they were referred to as North and South Carolina. Each received separate royal colonies in 1729. Named after King Charles I. The Latin version of Charles is "Carolus," from which "Carolina" is derived.
9. South Carolina (1663) - Originally part of the Province of Carolina. First the French and then the Spanish tried to establish settlements on the coastal land. Beginning in 1712, there were separate and distinct governments of the northeastern and southwestern parts of Carolina, and they were referred to as North and South Carolina. Each received separate royal colonies in 1729. Named after King Charles I. The Latin version of Charles is "Carolus," from which "Carolina" is derived.
10. New York (1664) - Originally founded by the Dutch (1614), it became a British colony in 1664. It was originally called New Netherland when the Dutch founded it — when the British took over in 1664 it received its present name that honors King Charles II's brother, the Duke of York and Albany. (The word York comes from the Latin word for city.)
11. New Jersey (1664) - First settled by the Dutch, the English took over in 1664. Around 1524, Giovanni de Verrazano became the first European to explore New Jersey. Colonial history of New Jersey started after Henry Hudson sailed through Newark Bay in 1609. Although Hudson was British, he worked for the Netherlands, so he claimed the land for the Dutch. It was called New

Netherlands. Small trading colonies sprang up where the present towns of Hoboken and Jersey City are located. The Dutch, Swedes, and Finns were the first European settlers in New Jersey. Bergen, founded in 1660, was New Jersey's first permanent European settlement. In 1664 the Dutch lost New Netherlands when the British took control of the land and added it to their colonies. It was named for the island of Jersey in the English Channel in honor of Sir George Carteret, one of the two men to whom the land that would become New Jersey was originally given. (Carteret had been governor of the Isle of Jersey.)

12. Pennsylvania (1681) - William Penn and the Quakers. The Swedes and Dutch were the first European settlers. In May of 1680, Penn petitioned King Charles II for land in the New World. The crown owed William's late father, Admiral Sir William Penn, for using his own wealth to outfit and feed the British Navy. Penn approached the King with an offer: Penn would forgive the debt in exchange for land in America. King Charles agreed and granted Penn a Charter on March 4, 1681. Penn wished to call the land "New Wales," or simply "Sylvania," Latin for "woods." King Charles II insisted that "Penn" precede the word "Sylvania", in honor of William's late father to create "Pennsylvania", or "Penn's Woods."
13. Georgia (1732) - James Oglethorpe as a settlement for debtors. In the 1730s, England founded the last of its colonies in North America. The project was the idea of James Oglethorpe, a former army officer. After Oglethorpe left the army, he devoted himself to helping the poor and debt-ridden people of London, whom he suggested settling in America. The four-fold purpose in founding Georgia were to provide relief of the poor; to build a buffer colony against the Spaniards in Florida and the French in Louisiana; to promote trade of Great Britain; and to provide refuge for persecuted Protestants (and carry Christianity to the 'Indians.' Georgia is named for King George II. King George granted the charter in 1732, stipulating that the territory bear his name. (The -ia suffix means 'state of' and comes from the Greek language.)

Vermont, which was not one of the 13 colonies, is named because, after seeing the Green Mountains, French explorer Samuel de Champlain referred to it as "Verd Mont" (green mountains) on a map in his native French.

Information here is primarily from Outline of US History, Alonzo L Hamby; Captain John Smith (1579-1631), Rossiter Johnson; The Thirteen Colonies, Jennifer Llewellyn & Steve Thompson; History-com

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the Mayflower, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young