

Summary: Life in the Middle Colonies

A Mix of People

In the 1600s, the Middle Colonies accepted people of different religions and cultures. The colonists were German, Dutch, Scots-Irish, Scandinavian, English, and enslaved Africans. Some were Catholic or Jewish. Proprietors allowed them to practice different religions. Proprietors allowed this religious tolerance for two reasons. First, leaders like William Penn believed that people of all religions should live together in peace. Second, some proprietors did not care about the colonists' religious beliefs. They just wanted colonists to buy or rent land.

Making a Living

Many families in the Middle Colonies were farmers. Men, women, and children all worked long hours in the fields and in the home. Boys helped plant and harvest crops. Girls did housework, cooking, and sewing.

The climate and soil of the Middle Colonies were very good for farming. Many farmers grew more than they needed for their families. They sold extra grain and livestock in the cities. Farmers used the long, wide rivers to ship their goods to Philadelphia and New York. Merchants there sold the farmers' goods to other cities and nations.

As in the other English colonies, the Middle Colonies had a free market economy. Proprietors did not tell the colonists what to do. Colonists could make what they thought would earn them the most money. This is called free enterprise.

Philadelphia and New York became busy ports and trade centers. Many artisans and laborers found work in these cities. Some of the laborers were enslaved Africans.

Many colonial children became apprentices to learn useful skills. Boys learned things like shoemaking and printing. Girls learned to spin thread and weave cloth.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

free market economy
noun, an economy in which the people, not the government, decide what will be produced

free enterprise *noun*, a system in which people may start any business that they believe will succeed

artisan *noun*, someone who is skilled at making something by hand

laborer *noun*, a person who does hard physical work

apprentice *noun*, someone who studies with a master to learn a skill or business

After You Read

REVIEW Why did proprietors allow religious tolerance? Highlight two reasons that proprietors allowed religious tolerance.

REVIEW Why did colonial children become apprentices? Highlight the sentence that tells the answer.