

The Southern Colonies

The Virginia Company of London founded the first southern colony when it sent about 100 men and boys to Virginia in 1607. The men named their settlement Jamestown in honor of King James. At first, they searched for gold instead of planting crops or building homes. The area they settled was swampy, and within a year most of the men had died from hunger and diseases spread by mosquitoes. Finally, Captain John Smith took over leadership, and under his rule those who did not work were left to starve. Gradually, the colony grew successful.



Four other colonies made up the South. In 1634, Lord Baltimore founded Maryland for religious freedom because in Great Britain he was mistreated as a Catholic. North and South Carolina started as a single colony in 1663 and stayed that way until the early 1700s.

In 1732, King George II granted James Oglethorpe (OH-guhl-thorp) the land for the colony of Georgia. Oglethorpe settled it and built forts to protect the English from the Spaniards in Florida.

Cash Crops and Plantations

The South's land was rich and its growing season long. Rivers kept the soil moist. Cash crops grew on large plantations (plan-TAY-shuhns). Virginia's main cash crop was tobacco. The Carolinas and Maryland raised corn and tobacco. Rice proved profitable (PROF-it-uh-buhl) for South Carolina and Georgia. By the 1740s, South Carolina grew indigo, a plant used to make a dark blue dye.

Planting, tending, and harvesting crops took many laborers. The plantation owners started out using indentured servants. These men and women paid for their passage to the New World by working on the plantations for years. But by the late 1600s, plantation owners started purchasing African slaves instead of using indentured servants.



Early Southern Governments

In 1619, male landowners in Virginia elected the members of the House of Burgesses (BURR-juhs-uhs). This was the first elected representative government in North America. Maryland had a similar assembly.

James Oglethorpe controlled the colonists in Georgia for 20 years. He made every decision until the British king made the land a royal colony. From that point on, the king named the leaders and council members.

Comprehension Question

In what ways did John Smith's rule affect life in Virginia?