

A VISIT TO THE MIDDLE COLONIES

This account of life in the middle colonies is by a Swedish visitor named Peter Kalm. He traveled through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York in 1748. These are condensed excerpts.

The country through which we passed was for the greatest part level, though sometimes there were long hills. Some parts were covered with trees, but by far the greater part of the country was without woods.

On the other hand, I never saw any place in America, the towns excepted, so well populated. An old man who lived in this neighborhood assured me that he could well remember the time when, between Trenton and New Brunswick, there were not above three farms. He reckoned that was about 50-some odd years ago.



During the greater part of the day we had very extensive cornfields on both sides of the road. Near almost every farm was a large orchard full of peaches and apple trees. In some of them the fruit was fallen from the trees in such quantities as to cover nearly the whole surface.

Part of it they left to rot, since they could not take it all in and consume it. Whenever we passed by, we were always welcome to go into the fine orchards and gather our hats and pockets full of the choicest fruit.

The country, especially all along the coasts in the English colonies, is inhabited by Europeans. In some places they are already so numerous that few parts of Europe are more populous. The Indians have sold the country

to the Europeans, and have retired further up. In most parts you may travel 120 English miles from the seashore before you reach the first houses of the Indians.

It is very possible for a person to have been at Philadelphia and other towns on the seashore for half a year without so much as seeing an Indian.

Besides the different sects of Christians, there are many Jews settled in New York, who possess great privileges. They have a synagogue and houses, and their own property in the countryside, and are allowed to keep shops in town. They have likewise several ships, which they send out with their own goods.

In truth, they enjoy all the privileges common to the other inhabitants of this town and colony.

New York, the capital of the colony of the same name, is about 97 English miles from Philadelphia. The situation is extremely advantageous for trade. The town stands upon a point which is formed by two bays, into which the Hudson River discharges itself. The place is generally reckoned very wholesome.

The port is a good one. Ships of the greatest burden [size] can lie in it. Its water is very salty, as the sea continually comes in upon it, and therefore is never frozen, except in extraordinarily cold weather.

New York probably carries on a more extensive commerce than any town in the English North American colonies; at least it may be said to equal them. Boston and Philadelphia, however, come very near to it.

Every year they build several ships here, which are sent to London, and there sold. Lately they have also shipped a quantity of iron to England. In return for these, they import from London every article of English

growth or manufacture, together with all sorts of foreign goods.

England, and especially London, profits immensely by its trade with the American colonies. Not only New York, but likewise all the other English towns on the continent, import so many articles from England that all their money must go to Old England in payment.



The goods with which the colony of New York trades are not very numerous. They chiefly export the skins of animals, which are bought from the Indians, great quantities of boards, timber, and lumber from the area around the Hudson River, and lastly, wheat, flour, barley, oats, and other kinds of corn.

New York likewise exports some flesh [meat] and other provisions. Iron, however, may be had more plentifully, as it is found in several parts of this colony, and is of a considerable goodness.

No manufactures [factories] of note have as yet been established here. At present they get all manufactured goods, such as woolen and linen cloth, etc., from England, and especially from London.

The Hudson River is very convenient for the commerce of this city, as it is navigable for near 150 English miles up the country, and falls into the bay not far from the town, on its western side. During eight months of the year this river is full of boats of all sizes, either going to New York or returning from there, laden either with inland or foreign goods.

The country people come to market in New York twice a week, much in the same manner they do at Philadelphia.

The governor of the colony of New York resides here, and has a palace in the fort. An assembly of delegates from all the districts of the colony is held in the city of New York once or twice every year. Everything relating to the good of the colony is here debated. The governor calls the assembly, and dissolves it [ends its meeting] at his pleasure.

The King appoints the governor according to his royal pleasure, but the inhabitants of the colony make up [provide] the governor's salary. Therefore, a man entrusted with this office has greater or lesser revenues according as he knows how to gain the confidence of the inhabitants.

There are examples of governors in this and other colonies of North America who, by their disagreements with the inhabitants, have lost their whole salary, the King having no power to make them pay it.

If a governor had no other resource in these circumstances, he would be obliged either to resign his office, or to be content with an income too small for his dignity, or else to agree in everything with the wishes of the inhabitants.

Group Discussion:

- 1. What did Peter Kalm see that shows that farmers settled in the middle colonies were doing very well in 1748?*
- 2. What indication is there that religious tolerance was already fairly common in New York at the time Kalm made his visit?*
- 3. What are the main points Kalm makes about trade and commerce between the colonies and England?*
- 4. What are the main points Kalm makes about the system of colonial government in New York?*