

# 1 New England: Commerce and Religion

**TERMS & NAMES**  
Backcountry  
subsistence farming  
triangular trade  
Navigation Acts  
smuggling

## MAIN IDEA

Fishing and trade contributed to the growth and prosperity of the New England Colonies.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Coastal cities in New England continue to engage in trade.

## ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Peleg Folger, a New England sailor, was only 18 years old when he began whaling. Folger kept a journal that describes what whaling was like in the 1750s. In one journal entry, Folger explained what happened after whales were sighted and small boats were launched to pursue them.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

So we row'd about a mile and a Half from the [ship], and then a whale come up under us, & [smashed in] our boat . . . and threw us every man overboard [except] one. And we all came up and Got Hold of the Boat & Held to her until the other boat (which was a mile and half off) came up and took us in, all Safe, and not one man Hurt, which was remarkable, the boat being threshed to pieces very much.

Peleg Folger, quoted in *The Sea-Hunters*

When Folger and his mates did manage to kill a whale, they cut a hole in its head. Then "a man got in up to his armpits and Dipt out [barrels] of clear oil." When the ship returned to port, this oil was sold to colonists, who used it as fuel in their lamps.

Many settlers in the New England Colonies—Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Rhode Island—turned to the Atlantic Ocean to make a living. The majority of New Englanders, however, were farmers.

Image not available for use on this CD-ROM. Please refer to the image in the textbook.

Whales hunted by New Englanders, such as Peleg Folger, might weigh as much as 50 tons and be over 60 feet in length.

## Distinct Colonial Regions Develop

Between 1700 and 1750, the population of England's colonies in North America doubled and then doubled again. At the start of the century, the colonial population stood at about 257,000. By 1750, more than 1,170,000 settlers called the English colonies home.

By the 1700s, the colonies formed three distinct regions: the New England Colonies, the Middle Colonies, and the Southern Colonies. Another area was the **Backcountry**. It ran along the Appalachian Mountains through the far western part of the other regions.

Several factors made each colonial region distinct. Some of the most important were each region's climate, resources, and people.

1. New England had long winters and rocky soil. English settlers made up the largest group in the region's population.
2. The Middle Colonies had shorter winters and fertile soil. The region attracted immigrants from all over Europe.
3. The Southern Colonies had a warm climate and good soil. There, some settlers used enslaved Africans to work their plantations.
4. The Backcountry's climate and resources varied, depending on the latitude. Many Scots-Irish immigrants settled there.

**Vocabulary**

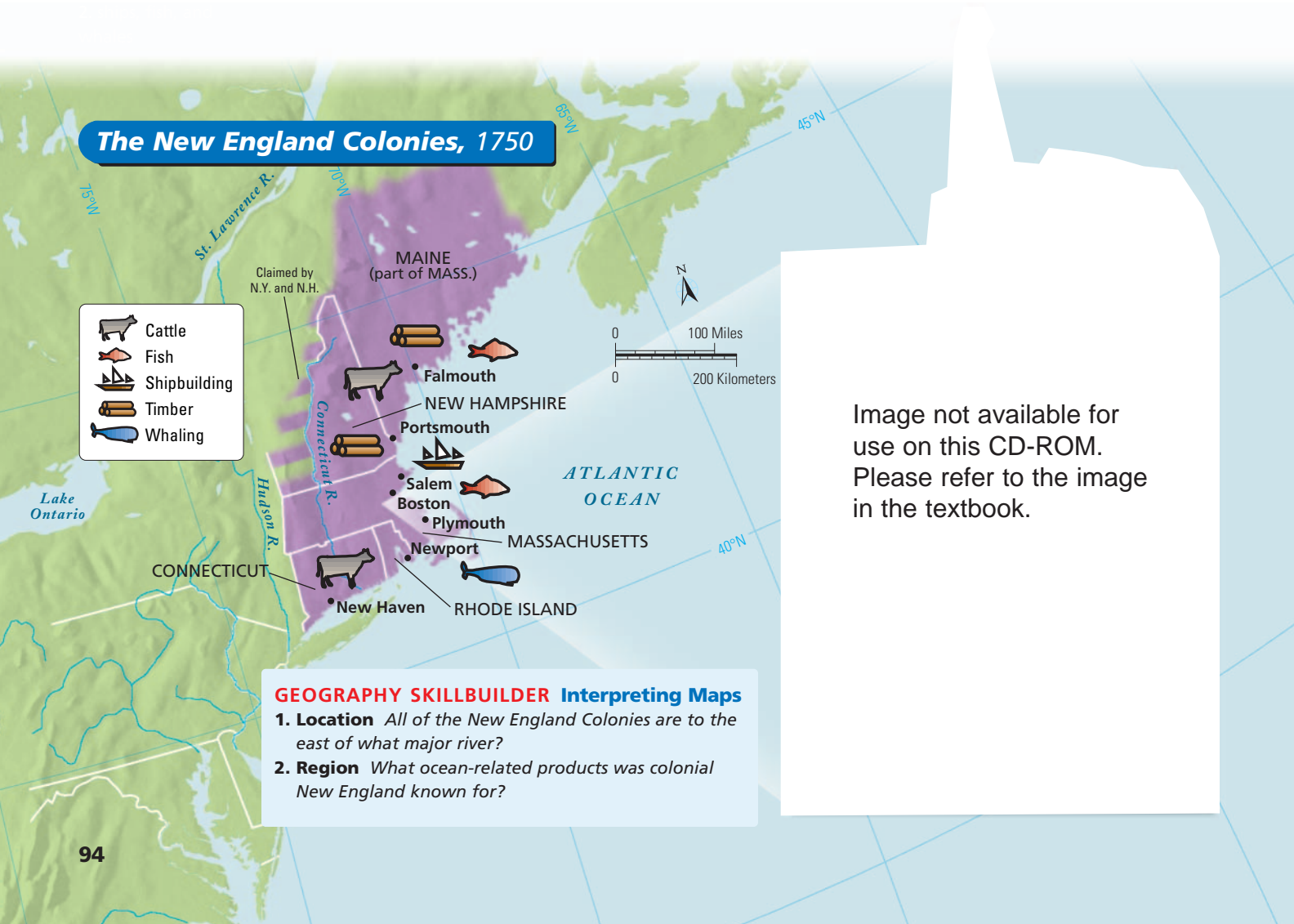
**latitude:** the distance north or south of the equator, measured in degrees

During the colonial era, the majority of people made their living by farming. However, the type of agriculture they practiced depended on the climate and resources in the region where they settled.

## The Farms and Towns of New England

Life in New England was not easy. The growing season was short, and the soil was rocky. Most farmers practiced **subsistence farming**. That is, they produced just enough food for themselves and sometimes a little extra to trade in town.

Most New England farmers lived near a town. This was because colonial officials usually did not sell scattered plots of land to individual



### The New England Colonies, 1750

- Cattle
- Fish
- Shipbuilding
- Timber
- Whaling

Claimed by N.Y. and N.H.

MAINE (part of MASS.)  
 Falmouth  
 NEW HAMPSHIRE  
 Portsmouth  
 Salem  
 Boston  
 Plymouth  
 Newport  
 MASSACHUSETTS  
 Connecticut R.  
 Hudson R.  
 CONNECTICUT  
 New Haven  
 RHODE ISLAND

ATLANTIC OCEAN



**GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Maps**

1. **Location** All of the New England Colonies are to the east of what major river?
2. **Region** What ocean-related products was colonial New England known for?

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farmers. Instead, they sold larger plots of land to groups of people—often to the congregation of a Puritan church. A congregation then settled the town and divided the land among the members of its church.

### Reading History

#### A. Recognizing

**Effects** How did the way land was sold in New England affect the way people lived?

This pattern of settlement led New England towns to develop in a unique way. Usually, a cluster of farmhouses surrounded a green—a central square where a meetinghouse was located and where public activities took place. Because people lived together in small towns, shopkeepers had enough customers to make a living. Also, if the townspeople needed a blacksmith or a carpenter, they could pool their money and hire one.

## Harvesting the Sea

New England's rocky soil made farming difficult. In contrast, the Atlantic Ocean offered many economic opportunities. In one story, a group of settlers was standing on a hill overlooking the Atlantic. One of them pointed out to sea and exclaimed, "There is a great pasture where our children's grandchildren will go for bread!"

The settler's prediction came true. Not far off New England's coast were some of the world's best fishing grounds. The Atlantic was filled with mackerel, halibut, cod, and many other types of fish.

New England's forests provided everything needed to harvest these great "pastures" of fish. The wood cut from iron-hard oak trees made excellent ship hulls. Hundred-foot-tall white pines were ideal for masts. Shipbuilders used about 2,500 trees to produce just one ship!

New England's fish and timber were among its most valuable articles of trade. Coastal cities like Boston, Salem, New Haven, and Newport grew rich as a result of shipbuilding, fishing, and trade.

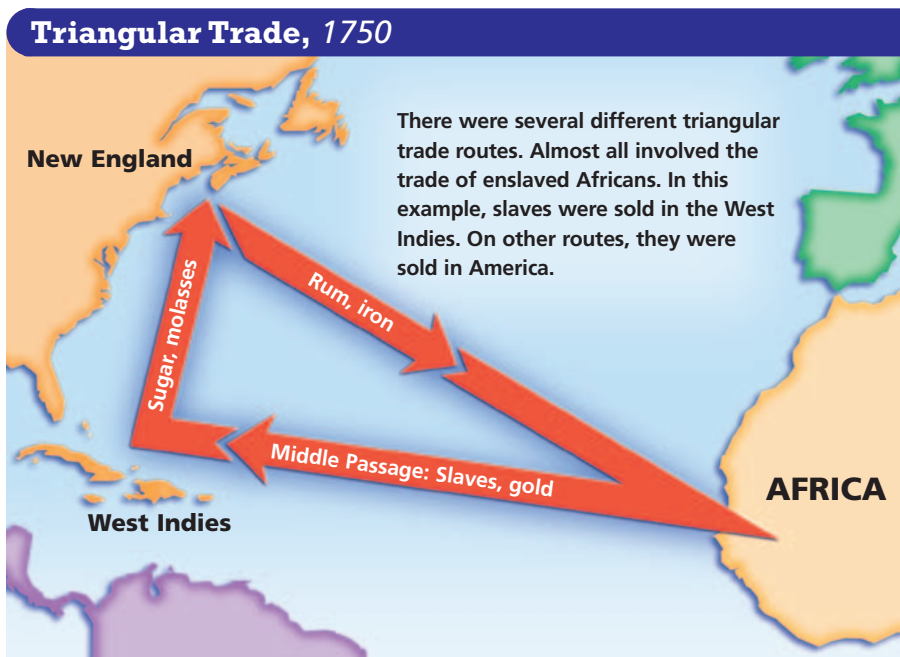
### Background

In 1742, over 16,000 people lived in Boston.

## Atlantic Trade

New England settlers engaged in three types of trade. First was the trade with other colonies. Second was the direct exchange of goods with Europe. The third type was the triangular trade.

**Triangular trade** was the name given to a trading route with three stops. For example, a ship might leave New England with a cargo of rum



and iron. In Africa, the captain would trade his cargo for slaves. Slaves then endured the horrible Middle Passage to the West Indies, where they were exchanged for sugar and molasses. Traders then took the sugar and molasses back to New England. There, colonists used the molasses to make rum, and the pattern started over.

New England won enormous profits from trade. England wanted to make sure that it received part of those profits. So the English government began to pass the **Navigation Acts** in 1651. The Navigation Acts had four major provisions designed to ensure that England made money from its colonies' trade.

1. All shipping had to be done in English ships or ships made in the English colonies.
2. Products such as tobacco, wood, and sugar could be sold only to England or its colonies.
3. European imports to the colonies had to pass through English ports.
4. English officials were to tax any colonial goods not shipped to England.

But even after the passage of the Navigation Acts, England had trouble controlling colonial shipping. Merchants ignored the acts whenever possible. **Smuggling**—importing or exporting goods illegally—was common. England also had great difficulty preventing pirates—like the legendary Blackbeard—from interfering with colonial shipping.

### Background

See Olaudah Equiano's descriptions of the Middle Passage on page 62.

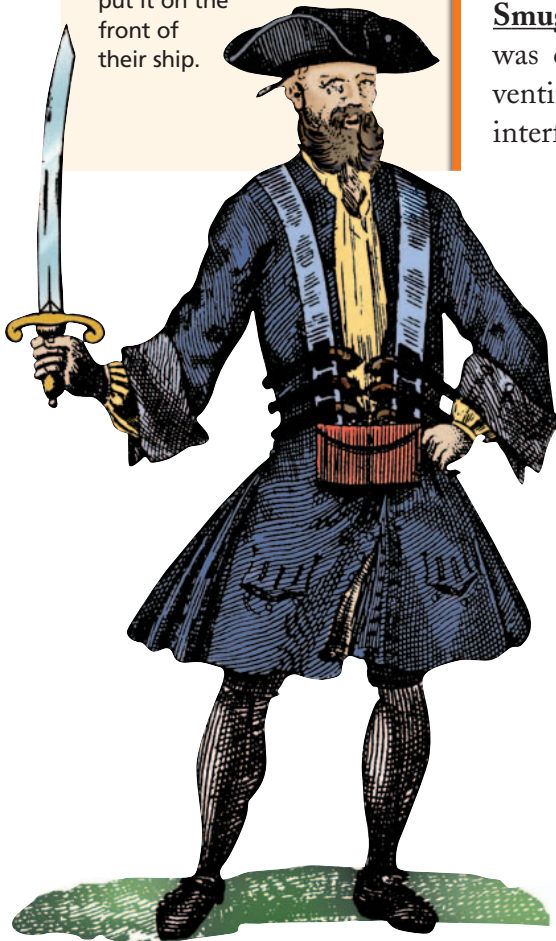
## STRANGE but True

### BLACKBEARD THE PIRATE

Of all the pirates who attacked colonial ships, Blackbeard (shown below) was the most famous. He was a fearsome man known to stick matches in his hair to light up his face during battle.

Blackbeard's pirate career finally came to an end in 1718, when Virginia's governor sent an expedition against him. Nearly half the expedition's men died in the key battle.

Blackbeard himself did not fall until he had suffered nearly 25 wounds. Before sailing back to port, sailors cut off his head and put it on the front of their ship.



## African Americans in New England

There were few slaves in New England. Slavery simply was not economical in this region of small farms. Also, because the growing season was short, there was little work for slaves during the long winter months. Farmers could not afford to feed and house slaves who were not working.

Even so, some New Englanders in larger towns and cities did own slaves. They worked as house servants, cooks, gardeners, and stable-hands. In the 1700s, slave owners seldom had enough room to house more than one or two slaves. Instead, more and more slave owners hired out their slaves to work on the docks or in shops or warehouses. Slave owners sometimes allowed their slaves to keep a portion of their wages.

Occasionally, some enslaved persons were able to save enough to buy their freedom. In fact, New

### ReadingHistory

**B. Analyzing Causes** Why were there relatively few enslaved workers in New England?

England was home to more free blacks than any other region. A free black man might become a merchant, sailor, printer, carpenter, or landowner. Still, white colonists did not treat free blacks as equals.

## Changes in Puritan Society

The early 1700s saw many changes in New England society. One of the most important was the gradual decline of the Puritan religion. There were a number of reasons for this decline.

One reason was that the drive for economic success competed with Puritan ideas. Many colonists, especially those who lived along the coast, seemed to care as much about business and material things as they did about religion. One observer had this complaint.

**“[Boston] is so conveniently Situated for Trade.”**

An observer in 1713

### ReadingHistory

#### C. Making

**Inferences** Why might an interest in material things compete with the Puritan religion?

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

[Boston] is so conveniently Situated for Trade and the Genius of the people are so inclined to merchandise, that they seek no other Education for their children than writing and Arithmetick.

An observer in 1713, quoted in *A History of American Life*

Another reason for the decline of the Puritan religion was the increasing competition from other religious groups. Baptists and Anglicans established churches in Massachusetts and Connecticut, where Puritans had once been the most powerful group.

Political changes also weakened the Puritan community. In 1691, a new royal charter for Massachusetts guaranteed religious freedom for all Protestants, not just Puritans. The new charter also granted the vote based on property ownership instead of church membership. This change put an end to the Puritan churches' ability to control elections.

To the south of New England were the Middle Colonies, which developed in quite different ways—as the next section shows.

## Section 1 Assessment

### 1. Terms & Names

**Explain the significance of:**

- Backcountry
- subsistence farming
- triangular trade
- Navigation Acts
- smuggling

### 2. Taking Notes

Use a chart like the one shown to record how New Englanders prospered from the Atlantic Ocean.

Economic Activity	Benefits to Colonists

How did some profit illegally from the ocean?

### 3. Main Ideas

- How did most people in New England earn a living?
- Why did England pass the Navigation Acts?
- What factors led to the decline of the Puritan religion in New England?

### 4. Critical Thinking

**Making Inferences** What advantages might there be in living near other people in small towns, such as those in New England?

#### THINK ABOUT

- the transportation options available to colonists
- why shopkeepers chose to open businesses in towns

#### ACTIVITY OPTIONS

#### ART TECHNOLOGY

Read more about whaling. Make a **mobile** that shows different kinds of whales or plan a **multimedia presentation** on whaling today.