

## Colonial Churches

By Sharon Fabian

---

In colonial times, Americans belonged to a variety of churches and worshipped in a variety of ways. Native Americans worshipped as they had for hundreds of years, and sometimes combined their traditions with selected elements from Christian religions. Slaves brought their own religions from Africa, although they were often not able to practice their religion as they wished. Colonists brought many Christian religions from Europe. The New England Colonies, the Middle Colonies, and the Southern Colonies each had their own religious character.

There were many Native American religions established in America before the arrival of the colonists. There were some similarities among many of them, and there were also a number of similarities between the Native American religions and the Christian religion of most of the colonists. Many Native Americans believed in a creator, or Great Spirit. They believed that a person's soul could live on after the person's death. Many of their religions had leaders similar to preachers in Christian religions. The Native Americans prayed, made offerings, and celebrated special occasions. Native American religions often taught that the supernatural was present in nature, not separate from nature as the Christian religions taught.

Slaves brought traditional African religions to America. Islam and Christianity were also brought to America by African slaves. Slaves were often discouraged from practicing their own religion, or even forbidden from doing so. For that reason, religions from Africa were not passed down as easily as other American religions. However, bits and pieces of African religions have survived. They can be recognized in spiritual beliefs about the importance of spirits and ancestors, and in songs and stories.

Colonists in New England were mainly Puritans. They were reformers who had left the Church of England in protest. They were clear about what they believed in, and they thought that everyone should believe as they did. Puritans felt that the government should be involved in religion, and in fact, should enforce religious beliefs. They believed that drunkenness, gambling, showy dress, swearing, and breaking the Sabbath were wrong and should not be allowed.

The Middle Colonies were more diverse. They were home to many religions, mostly Christian. People who were persecuted for their religion in other places came to the Middle Colonies, knowing that they could practice their own religion there. The Middle Colonies were home to Anglicans, Quakers (one of the groups who set the standard for religious tolerance), Dutch Reformed, Lutherans, Mennonites, Huguenots, Baptists, Jews, Catholics, Amish, and others.

The Church of England, whose members were known as Anglicans, became well-established in the Southern Colonies. This church, which was founded in England by King Henry VIII, spread slowly but eventually became the main religion in the Southern Colonies. Anglican church services were elaborate and very ceremonial. They included prayers, singing, and organ music. The Bruton Parish Church, which can still be visited in Williamsburg, Virginia, was a colonial Anglican church.

By the end of the colonial period, many religions had taken root in America. The tradition of religious tolerance had begun, and the problem of conflicting religious beliefs and practices had begun too.



Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Colonial Churches

### Questions

---

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. All of the colonists who came to America were Anglicans, since they had belonged to the Church of England.
- A. true
  - B. false
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. All Americans in colonial times were Christians.
- A. false
  - B. true
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Native American religions and Christian religions were similar because both believed in a Creator.
- A. false
  - B. true
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The New England colonies were well known for providing freedom of religion for people of all faiths.
- A. true
  - B. false
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. African Americans of colonial times came to America from a continent where traditional African religions, Islam, and Christianity were all practiced.
- A. false
  - B. true
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg was a/an \_\_\_\_\_ church.
- A. Puritan
  - B. Quaker
  - C. Native American
  - D. Anglican
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The predominant religion in colonial New England was the \_\_\_\_\_ religion.
- A. Puritan
  - B. Catholic
  - C. Jewish
  - D. Anglican
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The \_\_\_\_\_ colonies were the most tolerant of a variety of religions.
- A. Western
  - B. Middle
  - C. New England
  - D. Southern

