

## **Beginnings Of North European Expansion**

European overseas expansion after 1600 entered a second phase, comparable to developments at home. As Spain declined, so did the Spanish empire and that of Portugal, which was tied to Spain by a Habsburg king after 1580 and plagued with its own developing imperial problems. These new conditions afforded opportunities for northern European states. The Dutch, between 1630 and 1650, almost cleared the Atlantic of Spanish warships and took over most of the Portuguese posts in Brazil, Africa, and Asia. The French and English also became involved on a smaller scale, setting up their global duel for empire in the eighteenth century.

## **The Shifting Commercial Revolution**

Behind this change was a decisive shift in Europe's early commercial revolution. Expanding foreign trade, new products, an increasing supply of bullion, and rising commercial risks created new problems, calling for energetic initiatives. During the sixteenth century the Spanish and Portuguese had depended upon quick profits, and because of weak home industries and poor management, wealth flowed through their hands to northern Europe, where it was invested in productive enterprises. Later, this wealth generated a new imperial age.

European markets after the sixteenth century were swamped with a bewildering array of hitherto rare or unknown goods. New American foods included potatoes, maize (Indian corn), peanuts, tomatoes, and fish from Newfoundland's Grand Banks. In an era without refrigeration imported spices, such as pepper, cloves, and cinnamon, made spoiled foods palatable. Sugar became a common substitute for honey, and cocoa, the Aztec sacred beverage, spread throughout Europe. Coffee and tea, from the New World and Asia, soon produced new social habits throughout Europe. North American furs, Chinese silks, and cottons from India and Mexico revolutionized clothing fashion. Luxury furnishings, using rare woods, ivory, and Oriental carpets appeared more frequently in homes of the wealthy. The use of American tobacco became almost a mania among all classes and contributed further to the booming European market.

Imported gold and, more significantly, silver probably affected the European economy more than all other foreign goods. After the Spaniards looted Aztec and Inca treasure rooms, the gold flowing from America and Africa subsided to a trickle, but seven million tons of silver poured into Europe before 1660. Spanish prices quadrupled and, because most of the silver went to pay for imports, prices in northern Europe more than tripled. The influx of bullion and the resulting inflation hurt landlords depending on fixed rents and creditors who were paid in cheap money, but the bullion bonanza ended a centuries-long gold drain to the East, with its attendant money shortage. It also increased the profits of merchants selling on a rising market, thus greatly stimulating north European capitalism.

At the opening of the sixteenth century, Italian merchants and money-lenders, mainly Florentines, Venetians, and Genoese, dominated the rising Atlantic economy. The German Fugger Banking house at Augsburg also provided substantial financing. All south European bankers, particularly the Fuggers and the Genoese, suffered heavily from the Spanish economic debacles under Charles V and Philip II. As the century passed, Antwerp in the southern Netherlands became the economic hub of Europe. It was the center for the English wool trade as well as the entrepot (way station) for southbound trade from the Baltic and Portuguese goods from Asia. It was also a great financial center, dealing in commercial and investment instruments. The Spanish sack of Antwerp in 1576 ended Antwerp's supremacy, which passed to Amsterdam, where it furthered Dutch imperial ventures.

Meanwhile, north European capitalism flourished in nearly every category. Portuguese trade was rivaled by that of north European merchants in the Baltic and the North Atlantic. Northern joint stock companies pooled capital for

privateering, exploring, and commercial venturing. The Dutch and English East India companies, founded early in the seventeenth century, were but two of the better known stock companies. In England, common fields were enclosed for capitalistic sheep runs. Throughout western Europe, domestic manufacturing, in homes or workshops, competed with the guilds. Large industrial enterprises, notably in mining, shipbuilding, and cannon-casting were becoming common. Indeed, the superiority of English and Swedish cannon contributed to the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the Catholic armies in the Thirty Years' War.

### **The Dutch Empire**

By 1650, the Dutch were supreme in both southern Asia and the South Atlantic. Their empire, like the Portuguese earlier, was primarily commercial; even their North American settlements specialized in fur trading with the Indians. They acquired territory where necessary to further their commerce but tried to advance their interests by pragmatic policies, in accord with native cultures, rather than by conquest. Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese, they made little attempt to spread Christianity.

Systematic Dutch naval operations ended Iberian imperial supremacy, beginning in 1595 when the first Dutch fleet entered the East Indies. Dutch captains soon drove the Portuguese from the Spice Islands. Malacca, the Portuguese bastion, fell after a long siege in 1641. The Dutch also occupied Ceylon and blockaded Goa, thus limiting Portuguese operations in the Indian Ocean. Although largely neglecting East Africa, they seized all Portuguese posts on the west coast north of Angola. Across the Atlantic, they conquered Brazil, drove Spain from the Caribbean, and captured a Spanish treasure fleet. Decisive battles near the English Channel coast of Kent (1639) and off Brazil (1640) delivered the final blows to the Spanish navy. What the English had begun in 1588, the Dutch completed fifty years later.

Trade with Asia, the mainstay of the Dutch empire, was directed by the Dutch East India Company. Chartered in 1602 and given a monopoly of all operations between South Africa and the Straits of Magellan, it served to concentrate resources and eliminate costly competition. In addition to its trade and diplomacy, it sponsored numerous explorations of Australia, Tasmania, New Guinea, and the South Pacific. With its great concentration of capital, larger than the wealth of most states, the company could easily outdistance its European rivals.

The Dutch empire in the East was established primarily by Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587-1629), governor-general of the Indies between 1618 and 1629 and founder of the company capital at Batavia in northwest Java. At first he cooperated with native rulers in return for a monopoly of the spice trade. When this involved him in costly wars against local sultans as well as their Portuguese and English customers, Coen determined to control the trade at its sources. In the resulting many conflicts and negotiations, which lasted longer than Coen's time, the Dutch acquired all of Java, most of Sumatra, the spice-growing Moluccas, and part of Ceylon. They began operating their own plantations, supplying pepper, cinnamon, sugar, tea, tobacco, and coffee for a fluctuating world market.

Although commercially successful in Asia, the Dutch were not able to found flourishing settlement colonies. Many Dutchmen who went to the East wanted to make their fortunes and return home; those willing to stay were usually mavericks, uninterested in establishing families or permanent relationships. After 1620, the Dutch East India Company experimented with a policy of bringing European women to the Indies, but such efforts were abandoned when they failed to enlist much interest at home or in the foreign stations. Consequently, the Dutch colonies in Asia, as well as those in Africa, the Caribbean, and Brazil, remained primarily business ventures, with little racial mixing, compared with the Iberian areas.

After resuming war with Spain in 1621, the Dutch formed their West India Company, charged with overtaking Spanish and Portuguese holdings in Africa and America. The company wasted no time. It soon supplanted the Portuguese in West

Africa and by 1630 dominated the slave trade with America. After driving the Spanish from the Caribbean, the Dutch invited other European planters to the West Indies as customers, keeping only a few bases for themselves. The company then launched a successful naval conquest of Brazil, from the mouth of the Amazon south to the San Francisco River. In Brazil the Dutch learned sugar planting, passing on their knowledge to the Caribbean and applying it directly in the East Indies.

[See Batavia: Batavia (present-day Djakarta) on the island of Java became the headquarters of the Dutch East Trading Company when the Dutch ousted the Portuguese and took command of the East Indies trade in the 17th century. Courtesy]

Dutch settlements in North America never amounted to much because of the company's commercial orientation. In 1609 Henry Hudson (d. 1611), an Englishman sailing for Holland, explored the river named for him and established Dutch claims while looking for a northwest passage. Fifteen years later, the Dutch West India Company founded New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island; over the next few years, it built a number of frontier trading posts in the Hudson Valley and on the nearby Connecticut and Delaware rivers. Some attempts were made to encourage planting by selling large tracts to wealthy proprietors (patroons). Agriculture, however, remained secondary to the fur trade, which the company developed in alliance with the Iroquois tribes. This arrangement hindered settlement; in 1660 only 5000 Europeans were in the colony.

### The French Empire

French exploration began early and was followed by attempted settlements in the New World, but no permanent colonies were established until the opening of the seventeenth century. France was so weakened by religious wars that most of its efforts, beyond fishing and privateering, had to be directed toward internal stability. While the Dutch were winning their empire, France was involved in the land campaigns of the Thirty Years' War. Thus serious French empire building was delayed until the reign of Louis XIV.

Early French colonization in North America was based on claims made by Giovanni da Verrazzano (1485-1528) and Jacques Cartier (1491-1557). The first, a Florentine mariner commissioned by Francis I in 1523, traced the Atlantic coast from North Carolina to Newfoundland. Eleven years later, Cartier made the first of two voyages, exploring the Saint Lawrence River. These French expeditions duplicated England's claim to eastern North America.

A wilderness stretching hundreds of miles separated the early French Canadian colonies from their English counterparts. A first French settlement was made at Port Royal (Nova Scotia) in 1605. Three years later, Samuel de Champlain (1567-1635), acting for a French-chartered company, founded Quebec on the Saint Lawrence. The company brought in colonists, but only a few came before Champlain's death in 1635 and only 2500 had arrived by 1663. The company's emphasis on fur trading, the bitter cold of the winters, and the nearly continuous skirmishes with the Indians retarded growth. Montreal was established in 1642, after which French trapper-explorers began penetrating the region around the headwaters of the Mississippi. New France soon expanded over a wide area, but population remained sparse.

Elsewhere, the French seized opportunities afforded by the decline of Iberian sea power. They acquired the Isle of Bourbon in the Indian Ocean (1642) for use as a commercial base. In West Africa, they created a sphere of commercial interest at the mouth of the Senegal, where they became involved in the slave trade, with only slight opposition from the Dutch. Even more significant was the French presence in the West Indies. They occupied part of Saint Kitt's in 1625 and acquired Martinique and Guadeloupe ten years later. The burgeoning sugar trade helped make the French islands profitable, but fierce attacks by the Caribs limited colonization and economic development.

### The English Empire

In terms of power and profit, English foreign expansion before 1650 was not impressive. Like French colonialism, it was somewhat hampered by internal political conditions, particularly by the poor management and restrictive policies of the early Stuart kings, which led to civil war in the 1640s. A number of circumstances, however, promoted foreign ventures. The population increased from three to four million between 1530 and 1600, providing a large reservoir of potential indentured labor. Religious persecution encouraged migration of nonconformists, and surplus capital was seeking opportunities for investment. Such conditions ultimately produced a unique explosion of English settlement overseas.

During the sixteenth century, English maritime operations were confined primarily to exploring, fishing, smuggling, and plundering. English claims to North America were registered in 1497-1498 by two voyages of John Cabot, who explored the coast of North America from Newfoundland to Virginia but found no passage to Asia. For the next century, English expeditions sought such a northern passage, both in the East and in the West. All of them failed, but they resulted in explorations of Hudson Bay and the opening of a northern trade route to Russia. From the 1540s, English captains, including the famous John Hawkins of Plymouth, indulged in sporadic slave trading in Africa and the West Indies, despite Spanish restrictions. Their encounters on the Spanish main generated the exploits of English "sea dogs," like Sir Francis Drake, whose raids on Spanish shipping helped prepare the defeat of the Armada.

After failures in Newfoundland and on the Carolina coast, the first English colony in America was founded in 1607 at Jamestown in Virginia. For a number of years the colonists suffered from lack of food and other privations, but they were saved by their dauntless leader, Captain John Smith (1580-1631), whose romantic rescue by the Indian princess Pocahontas (a. 1595-1617), is an American legend. Jamestown set a precedent for all English colonies in North America. By the terms of its original charter, the London Company, which founded the settlement, was authorized to act as a miniature government for the colonists, who were to enjoy all the rights of native Englishmen. Consequently, in 1619, the governor called an assembly to assist in governing. This body later became the Virginia House of Burgesses, one of the oldest continuously operating representative legislatures.

[See Jamestown In 1607: View of Jamestown in 1607 drawn by John Hull. Surrounded by water on three sides, the marshy peninsula on the James River seemed an easy-to-defend and thus ideal location for the Jamestown fort. By 1614 there were "two faire rowes of howses" protected by a palisade. Courtesy A.H. Robbins Company]

Shortly after the founding of Jamestown, large-scale colonization began farther north. In 1620, a group of English Protestants who called themselves Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. Despite severe hardships, they survived, and their experiences inspired other religious dissenters against the policies of Charles I and Archbishop Laud. In 1629, the Massachusetts Bay Company settled a number of English Calvinists near the present-day site of Boston, where they were given the rights to virtual self-government. From this first enclave, emigrants moved out to other areas in present-day Maine, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Before 1642 more than 25,000 people had migrated to New England, laying the foundations for a number of future colonies. This exodus firmly planted English culture and political institutions in North America.

Life in the North American English settlements was hard during those first decades, but a pioneering spirit and native colonial pride was already evident. In all areas, food was scarce, disease was ever present, and Indians were often dangerous. Yet from the beginning, and more than in other European colonies, settlers here looked to their futures in the new land because they had left less behind in Europe. Most were expecting to stay, establish homes, and raise families, as well as make their fortunes. The first Puritans included both women and men. A shipload of "purchase brides" arrived in 1619 at Jamestown to lend stability to the colony. This was but the first of many such contingents, all eagerly welcomed by prospective husbands. In addition, many women came on their own as indentured servants.

American colonial women were legally dependent upon their husbands, who controlled the property and the children. A widow achieved these rights, but it was not easy to outlive a husband. Hard work and frequent pregnancies - mothers with a dozen children were not uncommon - reduced female life expectancies. Nevertheless, women developed a rough endurance and gained confidence and practical independence. This independent spirit was revealed by Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643), who was banished from Massachusetts for preaching her own religious beliefs and then founded a settlement in Rhode Island. Another example is Anne Bradstreet (c. 1612-1672). Although made painfully aware that men considered her presumptuous, she continued to write thoughtful and beautiful poetry.

The English government considered the rough coasts and wild forests of North America less important in this period than footholds in the West Indies and Africa, where profit were expected from planting and slave-trading. A wave of English migrants descended upon the West Indies, after the Dutch opened the Caribbean. In 1613, English settlers established themselves on Bermuda, and by the 1620s others had planted colonies on Saint Kitt's, Barbados, Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua, and in the Bahamas. Tobacco planting was at first the major enterprise, bringing some prosperity and the promise of more. The white population expanded dramatically, especially on Barbados, which was not subject to Carib attack. There the English settlers increased from 7000 to 37,000 in seven years. As yet, however, there were few blacks on the English islands, although some were already being imported for the sugar plantations.

Meanwhile, English slaving posts in West Africa were beginning to flourish and English adventurers were starting operations in Asia. Captain John Lancaster, with four ships, visited Sumatra and Java in 1601, returning with a profitable cargo of spices. His voyage led to the founding of the English East India Company, which was chartered in 1609. But expansion outside of the Caribbean was difficult, because the Dutch were uncooperative. In the Moluccas, for example, they drove out the English in the 1620s, after repeated clashes. The English fared better in India. By 1622, the English East India Company had put the Portuguese out of business in the Persian Gulf. Subsequently, the English established trading posts on the west coast of India at Agra, Masulipatam, Balasore, and Surat. The station at Madras, destined to become the English bastion on the east coast, was founded in 1639.

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