

Chapter 4:

Daily Life in Colonial New York



Life in the 13 Colonies was hard work. Many people in cities such as New York City were involved in the fur trade or other trade across the Atlantic. Clothes makers, blacksmiths, bakers, and other craftsmen lived and worked in cities.

Outside the city most settlers lived off the land, growing crops or hunting for all of their food. The father of a family usually ran the family farm or a business. Farmers grew corn, beans, squash, wheat, oats, and barley. Colonial families had to cut down trees to clear land in order to plant crops. Then they used the logs to build their homes.

Children also pitched in and helped on the farm and in the home. They milked cows and collected eggs from the family's chickens. Boys chopped wood, while girls collected water from a well or nearby stream.

Critical Thinking with Primary Sources

There weren't many schools in Colonial times, so children were often taught in teachers' homes. These were called "dame schools." Compare this painting of a dame school in Colonial times to your classroom. How is it similar? How is it different?



School Life

Education was very important to the Dutch colonists of New Netherland. They believed that both boys and girls should get an education. But in the English colonies, only boys went to school.

Children were taught reading, spelling, grammar, and arithmetic. They also studied the Bible. New Amsterdam had its first school by 1638. But after the British took over, public education in New York lagged behind many of the other colonies. Wealthy parents hired tutors. Others taught their children to read and write at home. Some went to religious schools, but many had no schooling at all.

Women's Rights

The wife's main role was always raising children and taking care of the home. But women had more rights when the colony was under Dutch rule. Unlike married women in the British colonies, women in New Netherland could own property and run businesses. Rather than taking their husband's last name, they also kept their maiden names when they got married.



Women had more rights when New York was under Dutch rule. The woman in black (third from right with arm raised) was a Quaker preacher.