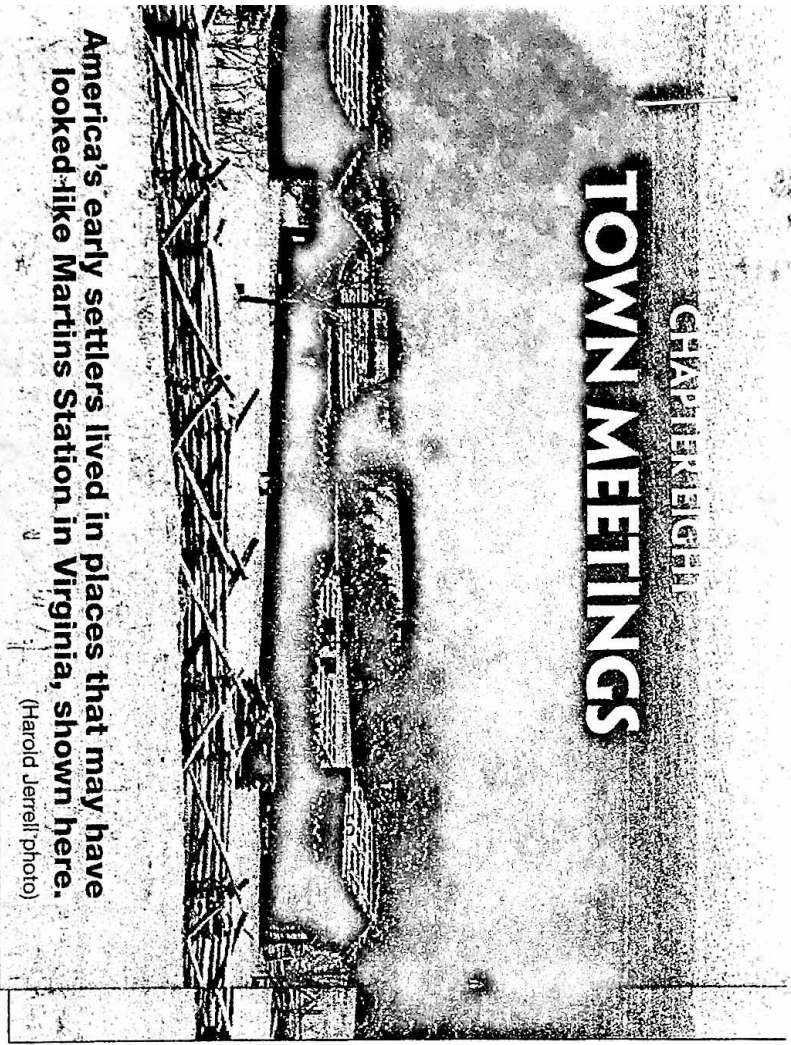


# TOWN MEETINGS



America's early settlers lived in places that may have looked like Martins Station in Virginia, shown here.

(Harold Jerrell photo)

People who left Europe for the New World still owed

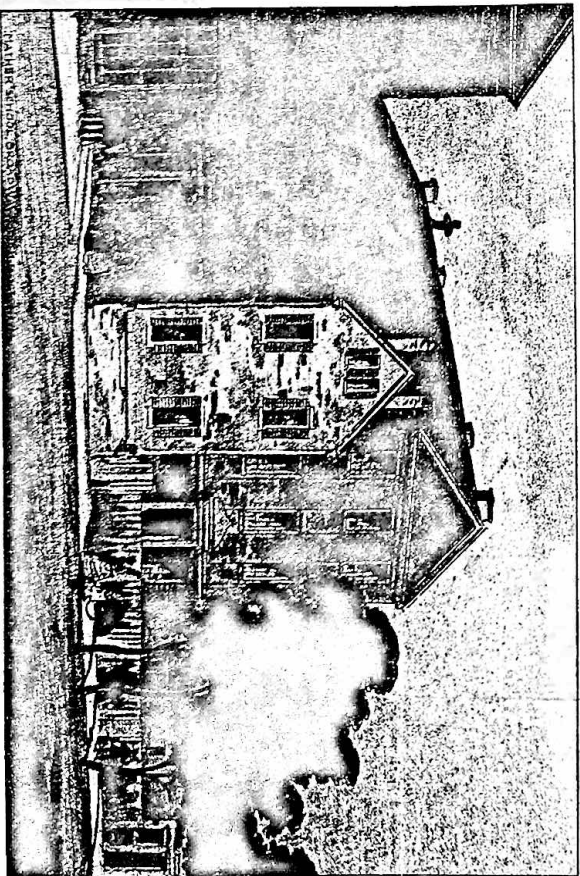
allegiance to England (which became known as Great Britain in 1707). They were loyal to the king. But the colonists had a little more say in the way their government was run than people in Great Britain. Here are three reasons why:

- The colonies were more than 3,000 miles from Great Britain. That is far away now, and in some ways it was much farther away then. You see, it could take as long as four months for a ship to make it across the Atlantic Ocean. That's a long time!
- People who lived in Great Britain generally knew that they could count on the British army to defend them. However, the colonists knew they could not count on the British army

to deal with American Indians on a day-to-day basis. The colonists had to organize and defend themselves. This led to the creation of leaders in the colonies. It also led the colonists to think of themselves as Americans, not just subjects of the British crown.

- By the very act of coming to the New World, the colonists had shown that they wanted to break away from British society. Many colonists came to America because they wanted to worship God as they pleased. Many came because they owed money in Britain and wanted a fresh start. Many came because of the adventure of it all!

The best examples of representative government were in Virginia and New England. In 1619, the governor of Virginia asked every town to choose a leader to be a member of the House



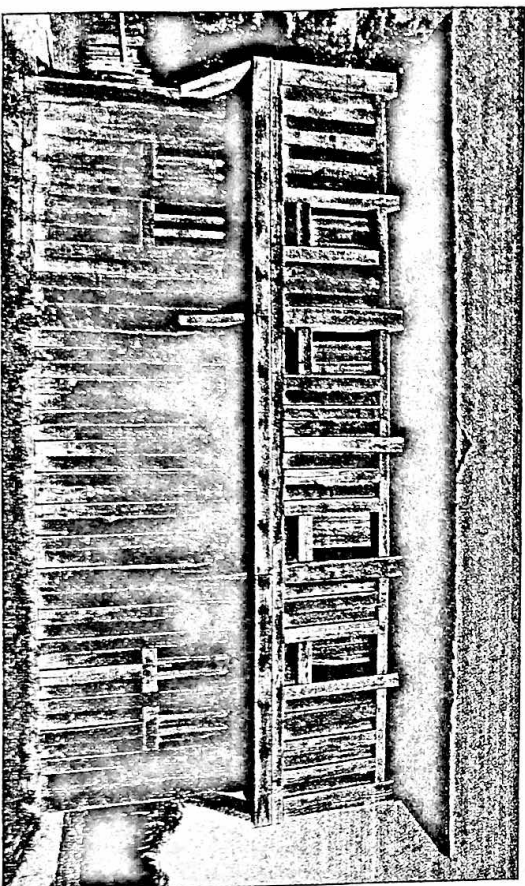
The Mather School was the first public elementary school in America. It was started in Dorchester, Massachusetts, which had the first town meeting in America. (Digital Composite wealth image)

of Burgesses, the House of Burgesses became the first representative government in America. However, its powers were generally limited to matters of law and order within the colony.

New England's colonies didn't have a House of Burgesses, but they had what were known as town meetings. These meetings were attended by just about everyone in a community. We believe that the very first town meeting in the United States was held in Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1633. According to town records, the purpose of the meetings was to establish "such orders as may tend to the general good as aforesayd." It was at these early town meetings in Dorchester that the need for a school for children was discussed. Only six years after that first town meeting, the first public elementary school opened in Dorchester.

Within a few years, the tradition of town meetings spread all over New England, where it remains today.

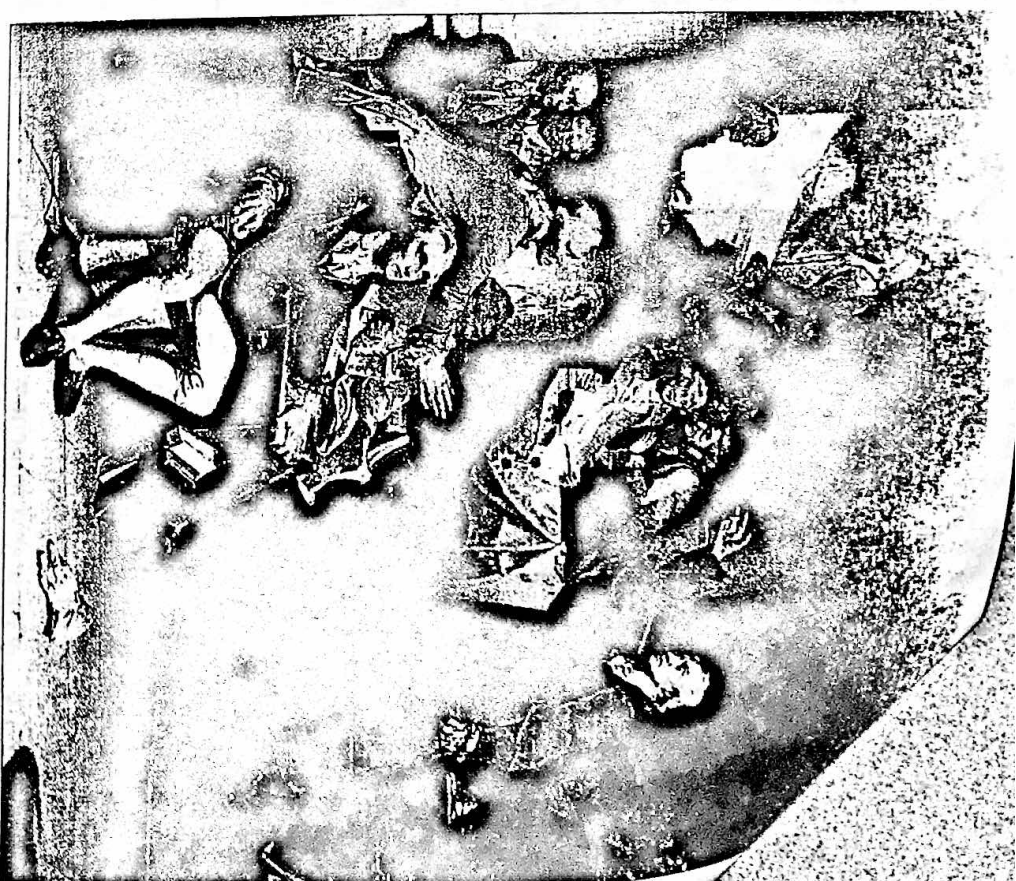
In spite of these town meetings and representative democracies,



### The town meeting house at Plymouth, Massachusetts

(Arndreas Juergensmeier/Shutterstock)

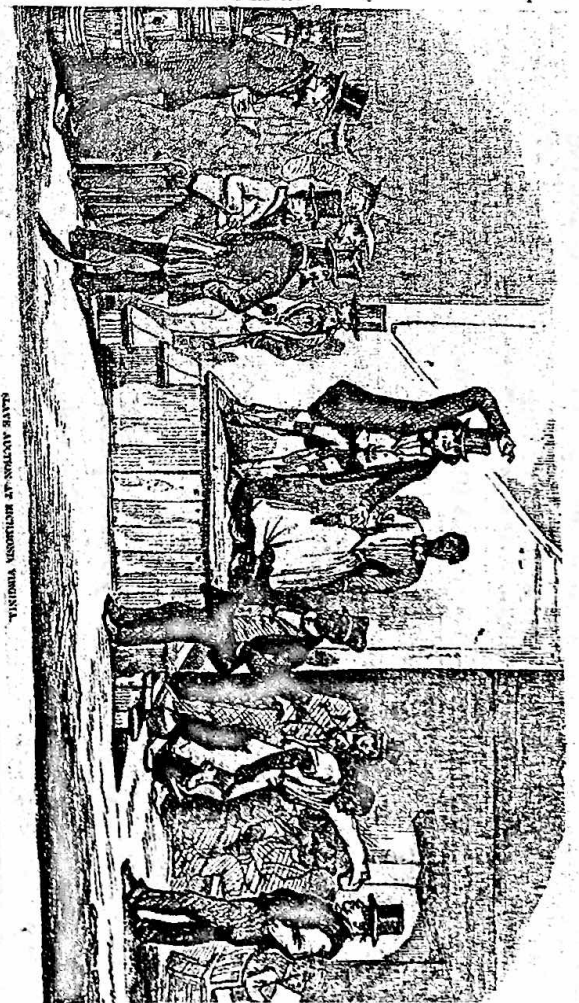
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**This famous painting shows Patrick Henry speaking to the Virginia House of Burgesses in the mid 1700s—long after it first met in 1619.** (Peter Rothenmel)

the colonies were still limited in what they could do. The colonies were still, after all, part of Great Britain. It was against the law for the American colonies to trade with other European countries such as France or Spain. Colonists also had to pay taxes to Britain.

Also remember that each colony was different. Colonists in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia didn't have as much representative democracy as colonists in New England. ❁



**A sketch of a slave market in Richmond, Virginia**  
(Public domain image)

## CHAPTER NINE

# SERVANTS AND SLAVES

When students study the 13 original colonies, they usually focus on the founders. These were the rich people—people who were so powerful that they could gain favor with the king or queen, for instance.

However, most of the people who came to the colonies were very poor. Two categories that deserve special mention are **indentured servants** and **black slaves**.

A lot of people wanted to come to the New World because they were practically starving in Europe and didn't have enough

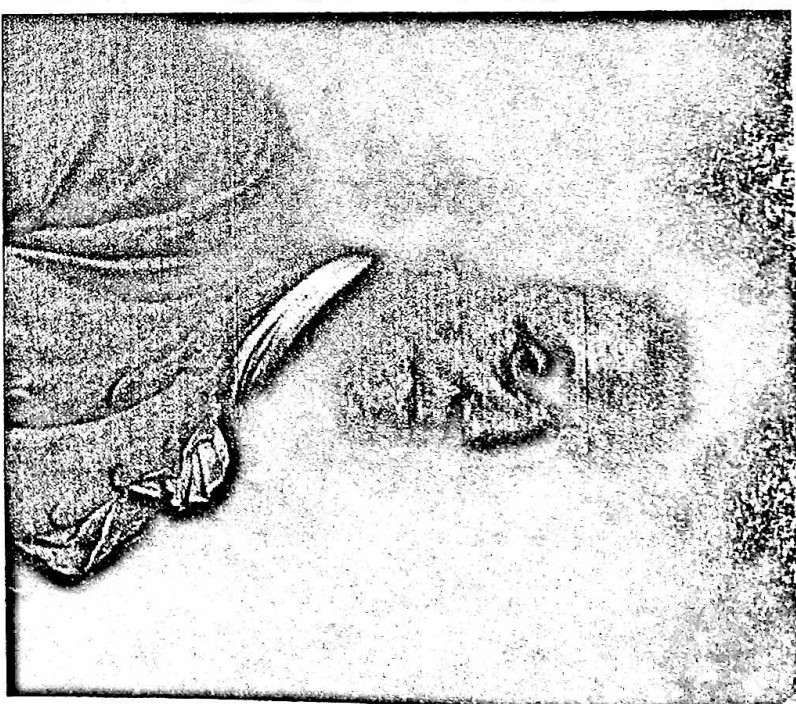
money for a decent life. People of this type could not afford to pay the sea **passage**, but they still wanted to come.

Many of them signed agreements to come to America to work as a servant for a period of time in order to pay the cost of their passage. These agreements were usually made with the sea captain, who would "sell" the contracts to plantation or factory owners when they got to America. Typically, an indentured servant had to work for seven years to pay his or her passage.

More than half of the white immigrants to the United States were indentured servants. They were especially **numerous** in Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.



**In one of Tennessee History for Kids videos, History Bill encountered an indentured servant named Maggie Delaney.** (THFK photo)

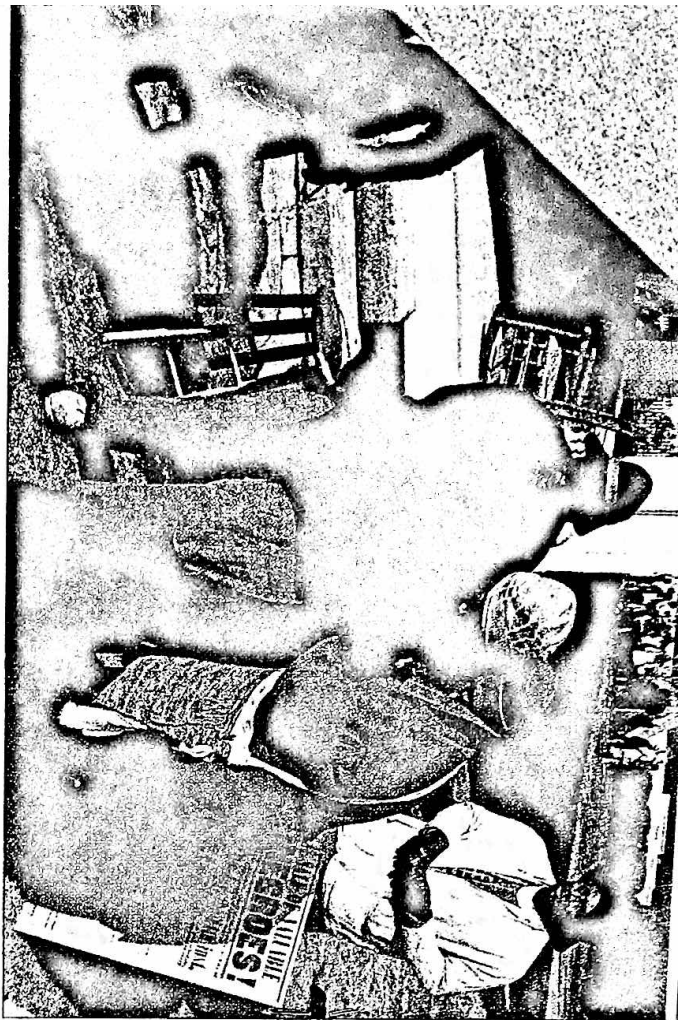


**Benjamin Franklin** (Painting by Joseph Duplessis)

The best known indentured servant in American history was Benjamin Franklin. When Franklin came to America, he was indentured to his brother, who was a printer.

People who were indentured servants generally chose to be indentured servants. Indentured servants were free after the period of their service ended.

Black slaves, on the other hand, were **kidnapped** from their homeland, in Africa. Typically, they were slaves for life, with no chance of advancement and no hope that their children would ever be anything but slaves.



**The Princely Players, a Nashville performing group, try to bring to life the horrors of slavery.** (THEK photo)

Slaves were first brought to the North American colonies in Virginia in 1619. However, the **import** of slaves didn't really take off in America until about 1670.

At one time or another, there were black slaves in every colony. But slavery grew much faster in the Southern Colonies after it became clear that large tobacco farms (called **plantations**) could make a lot of money. By around 1750, more than half of the black slaves in America lived in only two states, those being Virginia and Maryland.

Eventually, a lot of those slaves in Virginia and Maryland would be forced to move southwest to a new state called Tennessee. 🗺️

## QUESTIONS

1) Why would a person have agreed to become an indentured servant in the first place?

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2) What colonies had the most indentured servants?

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3) In what year were black slaves first brought to the North American colonies? \_\_\_\_\_

4) Why did slavery grow more in the Southern Colonies than it did in the New England or Middle Colonies?

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