

Colonial America:
The Craftspeople

When people came to the colonies, they often had no idea how hard life was going to be. Some colonists were skilled craftspeople in Europe before they sailed to the colonies, but had to learn how to make much of what they needed to survive. Colonists may have brought seeds for fruits and vegetables with them on the ships from Europe so they could plant them in the rich soil of their new farms. However, they still needed to learn how to farm in an unfamiliar place. A lot of the fruits and vegetables they ate (such as corn, squash, and berries) were native to the New World. As villages and towns grew, people interacted with one another. They relied on each for many things.

In colonial times, many goods were imported or made in small shops or at home. If someone needed a barrel, a chair, or a wheel for their wagon, they might make it themselves. But if they had the money, they would most likely pay a craftsman to make it by hand in his shop. Craftspeople made furniture, utensils for the home, and tools to use on farms and for building houses. Some, but not all, people were tradesmen. This means that they were skilled in one trade. The cooper, for example, made barrels, and the wheelwright made wheels.

Craftspeople helped colonial towns grow. Although most colonists lived in rural areas, some settlers lived in towns where several craftspeople opened shops. The craftspeople sold their goods and charged customers the amount it cost to make the product, plus a little extra as profit. Not everyone was able to pay in cash, though. Some people had to exchange items grown or raised on farms, such as eggs and vegetables, as payment to the shopkeepers. This was called the barter system.

One person couldn't do it all alone. The shoemaker needed the leather made by a tanner and the tools made by the blacksmith to make the shoes he'd sell in his shop. The farmer needed the wheels for his wagon made by the wheelwright, the blade of his plow and other tools made by the blacksmith, and the barrels made by the cooper to store the food he grew. Craftsmen and farmers working together and sharing their special skills created a culture of interdependence among the colonists.

Flesch-Kincaid 7.9
1080L