

Discussion questions: Expanding to the west

BY PAULINE S. JOHNSON

The following discussion questions will help guide students' comprehension as they read the article "Expanding to the west: Settlement of the Piedmont region, 1730 to 1775¹." Possible responses are included after each question.

1. **Why did most early settlers to North Carolina remain in the Coastal Plain before 1730?**

This area had already been established with towns, trade routes, and farms. Settlement did not move west as easy access by water was prevented by the fall line and there were no roads that provided transportation east and west. Also, before 1715 this area had been inhabited by Indians. By the 1730s most of the Piedmont Indians had moved, consolidated, or been ravaged by disease which helped open the Piedmont to European settlement.

2. **What two roads made settlement in the Piedmont possible? Where were they located? Why is the direction the roads followed significant?**

The Great Indian Trading Path — from Petersburg, VA southwest to Mecklenburg County. The Great Wagon Road — from Pennsylvania south through the Shenandoah Valley to the Carolinas.

Since these roads connected the Piedmont with areas to the north and eventually south, there was more contact with other colonies than with the rest of North Carolina.

3. **What towns developed along each of these roads? Why did these towns continue to grow during this period?**

Great Indian Trading Path — Hillsborough, Charlotte, Salisbury

Great Wagon Road — Bethabara, Bethania, Salem, Salisbury

Towns were important trading and societal centers. Courts, schools, markets, taverns, and churches operated in the towns. As the population of the Piedmont grew, these towns became more influential to the culture and economic development of the region.

4. **During the early period of settlement in the Piedmont, why did the people trade with the colonies to the north and south rather than the towns in the Coastal Plain?**

The roads followed in a north/south direction. And water transportation from the

Piedmont flowed to South Carolina rather than towards the sounds of the Coastal Plains. It was easier and more cost efficient to trade north and south, rather than to the east.

5. **How do you imagine this trade practice affected the relationship between the people of the Piedmont and the colonial government that was located in the eastern part of the colony?**

Answers will vary, but students should recognize that some rivalries or even resentment would have developed as North Carolina trade was heading into other colonies rather than to the Coastal Plain. By the late 1760s, the colonial government had attempted to make adjustments by improving or building roads to the east. Some students may also recognize that there will have been a lack of understanding between the two regions as many of the Piedmont settlers would have more contact with those in Virginia and/or South Carolina.

6. **What groups settled in the Piedmont between 1730 and 1775?**

Scots-Irish, Germans (particularly Moravians), Quakers, English Baptists, Africans (slaves brought by settlers)

7. **What were some of the push/pull factors that lead these groups to move to North Carolina?**

Answers will vary, but could include: inexpensive and large quantities of good land; uninhabited areas that offered settlement for religious groups that wished to remain secluded; relatively straightforward transportation from northern areas to the Piedmont by way of established routes; opportunity to move with others of the same ethnicity or from the same home country; rivers that offered good placement of mills and transportation to South Carolina; at the beginning of the settlement boom, the region was generally unpopulated; most of the Indian threat had been removed

8. **While most of the settlers lived on farms, what were other ways they earned money in this region? What does this tell you about life in the Piedmont in the 18th century?**

“Settlers built stores, gristmills, sawmills, and tanneries. Blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers, potters, rope makers, wagon makers, and wheelwrights established many local industries. Brewers, distillers, weavers, hatters, tailors, and others practiced their trades either in isolated homes or in shops in towns.” Students may also mention teachers, ministers, and traders or drovers.

Students should understand that the settlers were developing their own society in the region. They did not have the immediate contact that colonists further east had within their colony or with cities and towns on the seaboard. These Piedmont settlers were self-sufficient and did not maintain close contact with North Carolinians to the east.

9. **By the late 1760s, the population of the Piedmont was larger than that of the Coastal Plain. The settlers in the Piedmont continued to trade with Virginia and South Carolina. How do these statements help to explain the tensions of the Regulator Movement?**

Students should understand that the lack of communication and understanding between the east and the backcountry helped to lead to the Regulator Movement. As the population of the Piedmont continued to grow, the colonists there expected to be treated in a fair and equitable manner. When this did not happen, they organized to demand their rights as British citizens.

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Notes

1. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/2030>.

About the author

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I am currently the Director of a Teaching American History Grant for Buncombe County Schools, Asheville City Schools, and Madison County Schools. I have taught history and English in the seventh and eighth grades for over twenty-six years at Reynolds Middle School in Asheville, North Carolina. I am currently doing adjunct work for Mars Hill College and Western Carolina University. I have a Masters Degree from Western Carolina University and am Nationally Board Certified in Early Adolescence/Social Studies-History. I am certified to teach K-12 and I also have Academically-Intellectually Gifted certification.