Why Were There Thirteen Colonies in America?

When you study early American history you learn a great deal about the thirteen original colonies along the Atlantic Coast of North America: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. The list of colonies is in geographical order from north to south and not in the order that they were founded.

No one set out with a plan in the 1600 or 1700s to create thirteen colonies that came together as a new nation. Explorers from different countries in Europe sailed across the Atlantic Ocean and landed in various places along the seacoast and claimed that land for their country. For example, Dutch explorer Henry Hudson sailed to the North American continent in 1609 and discovered the Hudson River in what is now New York State. His trip was financed by the Dutch East India Company. In 1621 they created a settlement called New Amsterdam and named their colony New Netherlands.

When Henry Hudson was first exploring the area of present-day New York, British colonists organized by the Virginia Company of London had already established the Jamestown settlement in the Virginia Colony in 1607. The colonists were originally looking for gold. Massachusetts received its first European settlers when the Pilgrims arrived there in 1620 after being blown off course on their journey to Virginia.

Each of the thirteen colonies has its own story of how and why it was founded. The land for most of the colonies was granted to a company or individual by the King of England. The company or individual then organized people who moved to North America and settled in the colony. Some colonies were organized for religious freedom and others were money-making ventures.

During the 1600s Great Britain seized the colony of New Amsterdam by force and renamed it New York. Great Britain also seized the colony of Delaware, another colony not founded by English subjects. All thirteen colonies were then united under the British flag and were part of the British Empire.