13 Things You Didn't Know About the 13 Colonies
by Liana Mahoney

You probably already know the story of America's thirteen colonies. It's a story of perseverance, danger, adventure, and luck. It is the story of Virginia, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Maryland, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Delaware, North Carolina, New Jersey, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. At first, these colonies followed the rules and laws of England, but it wasn't long before they wanted to govern themselves. As a result, in 1776, it became the story of the birth of a nation, when these original thirteen colonies fought for their independence and became the United States of America.

Here are thirteen lesser-known facts that you may not know about the thirteen colonies.

1. There was a lost colony.

In 1585, Sir Walter Raleigh began the first English settlement in North America on Roanoke Island, just off the coast of what we now know as North Carolina. Living conditions here were harsh, and the colonists had no choice but to return to England just a year later. In 1587, Raleigh sent a second group of colonists, led by a man named John White. White left his family temporarily to sail back to England for more supplies. When he returned two years later, the colony had vanished! Everyone was gone. Carved into the bark of a tree was a single word: Croatoan. To this day, the fate of the Roanoke colony remains a mystery, and Roanoke is known as The Lost Colony.

2. Virginia was the first colony to establish a form of representative government.

In 1619, male landowners elected an assembly of leaders called the House of
Burgesses. The role of the House of Burgesses was to make laws for the Jamestown colony. This was the first form of representative government in the colonies, and it planted the seed for the future democracy that would later govern the United States of America.

**3. The first institution of higher learning was founded in Massachusetts.**

Harvard College was founded in the Boston, Massachusetts area a mere sixteen years after the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth.

**4. The colonies' names came from a variety of sources.**

Some, such as Virginia, Georgia, the Carolinas, and New York were named after royalty. Massachusetts is a Mohican Indian word that means "at the great hill." Connecticut is a Mohican Indian word that means "at the long tidal river." Rhode Island likely got its name from Dutch words meaning "red island," because there was red clay in the area in which it was first settled.

**5. Swedish settlers built the first log cabins.**

Settlers from Sweden formed a colony called New Sweden, where they built log cabins for homes. They were later conquered by the Dutch, who claimed New Sweden as part of New Netherland, which later became New York when the English claimed and renamed it in 1664.

**6. North Carolina was famous for its pirates!**

Edward Teach was a famous pirate known as Blackbeard. Up until the time of his death in 1718, he hid in the colony of Carolina after robbing ships of their treasure.

**7. The colony of Georgia was founded for people who were going to prison.**

James Ogelthorpe founded Georgia in 1732 because he felt that people who were
imprisoned for their debts should be able to work on their own farms to earn money and pay off their debts.

8. Most domestic and farm animals were brought to the United States by the colonists.

Pigs, domestic dogs, cows, horses, and chickens were brought to mainland America by the colonists.

9. The colonies were founded for a variety of different reasons.

While colonies such as Massachusetts, Maryland, and Pennsylvania were founded for the purpose of religious freedom, others, such as New York were founded in the hopes of finding wealth, jobs, and trade opportunities.

10. England had other colonies in the north.

In what is now Canada, there were other English colonies, including Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

11. The Great Seal of the United States.

The Great Seal of the United States has 13 stars and an eagle wearing a shield of 13 stripes and holding 13 arrows.

12. To help pay for the American Revolution, the colonies had to borrow more than ten million dollars from France, Spain, and the Netherlands.

This was an enormous amount of money at the time! It goes to show just how expensive a war can be, in addition to the loss of lives and the destruction of property. After the French and Indian War, Britain needed money to pay for its war expenses, so King George III began adding taxes to many of the colonists' goods. This taxation
angered the colonists and was the main reason they decided to break away from England and become an independent nation.

13. On September 9, 1776, two months after Independence Day, the Continental Congress officially changed the name from "United Colonies" to "United States of America." And that, as you probably already know, is the end of the story.
13 Things You Didn't Know About the 13 Colonies

1) Match the name of the colony to the word/group of words that best represents it.
   
   a) mystery
   Massachusetts
   
   b) danger
   Maryland
   
   c) prosperity
   North Carolina
   
   d) "Red Island"
   Roanoke Island
   
   e) Religious freedom
   Virginia
   
   f) Legislature
   New York
   
   g) Higher learning
   Rhode Island

2) Why did King George III impose taxes on many of the colonists' goods?
   What was the consequence of this?

3) What was the 'House of Burgesses'? What was their contribution to America?
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4) Name the reasons why different colonies were founded.

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5) Why do you think the writer chose to start with details of the lost colony as the fact number one?
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2) Why did King George III impose taxes on many of the colonists' goods? What was the consequence of this?

   After the wars with France and India, Britain needed money to pay for its war expenses, so King George III started imposing more taxes. This really angered the colonists so much so that they decided to break away from Britain to become an independent nation.

3) What was the 'House of Burgesses' and what was their contribution to America?

   The House of Burgesses was an assembly of leaders elected by male landowners. Their role was to make laws for the Jamestown colony. This was the first form of representative government in the colonies, and it laid the foundation for the future democracy that would later govern the United States of America.
4) Name the reasons why different colonies were founded.

Georgia was founded for prisoners to be able to work on their own farms to earn money and pay off their debts. Colonies such as Massachusetts, Maryland, and Pennsylvania were founded for the purpose of religious freedom. Others, such as New York were founded in the hope of finding wealth, jobs, and trading opportunities.

5) Why do you think the writer chose to start with details of the lost colony as the fact number one?

The author has stated in the introduction that she is going to tell the reader 13 lesser-known facts about the colonies, and this is probably the reason why she decided to start off with the Roanoke colony whose fate remains a mystery till date. This is simply the best way to generate keen interest in the young readers and encourage them to read further through the passage.