**Salutary Neglect**

From 1607 to 1763, the unwritten British policy for governing the American colonies was referred to as salutary neglect. Under salutary neglect, enforcement of parliamentary law was deliberately lax, with the stated objective of encouraging colonial prosperity. Colonists were, for the most part, left to look after their own affairs. The practice of salutary neglect for generations, along with the attempt to end this policy and reassert British authority in the 18th century, are identified as important factors leading to the American Revolution.

During this time, the colonists largely were self-governing. Beginning with the House of Burgesses in Virginia, each of the 13 colonies developed its own legislative body. By the 18th century, they were functioning as independent, autonomous governments.

Americans enjoyed personal and religious freedoms not shared by other British subjects. Maryland passed the Act Concerning Religion, or the Maryland Toleration Act, in 1649 to protect religious freedoms and promote tolerance. Similar legislation protecting religious freedom in Pennsylvania attracted settlers from the Quaker community.

Under salutary neglect, colonists did not feel a strong influence from the British government and culture. These developments led to a growing sense of American identity, distinct and separate from Britain. Americans had become used to the idea of self-governance and began to think of themselves as British subjects in name only.

**Note Questions**:

1. What is salutary neglect?

2. Why did Great Britain practice salutary neglect? (What was the point?)

3. What did each of the 13 colonies develop as a result of being left to look after their own affairs?

4. What affect did salutary neglect have on American identity?