

Life, Hardship, and Settlement in the Colony of Carolina

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Early accounts of the proprietary colony of Carolina, written during the seventeenth century, capture a world defined by risk and endurance. Through firsthand writings by William Hilton, Robert Horne, Samuel Wilson, and Thomas Newe, life in colonial Carolina appears to be demanding and unstable, shaped by the environment, scarcity, disease, and strained human relationships. These sources reveal the realities faced by European settlers and the profound disruptions imposed on Indigenous peoples during the colony's earliest years.

The physical environment shaped nearly every aspect of daily life. In *A Relation of a Discovery* (1664), William Hilton describes Carolina's rivers, forests, and fertile land, emphasizing navigability and natural promise (Hilton, 1664). His observations reflect the priorities of exploration, including mapping routes, identifying resources, and assessing the potential for settlement. The landscape, however, required constant adjustment. Dense forests, unfamiliar terrain, and a humid climate made travel and settlement challenging. For Indigenous peoples, this land was already structured by established systems of use and knowledge, systems increasingly displaced by European expansion.

Efforts to promote Carolina often minimized these challenges. In *A Brief Description of the Province of Carolina* (1666), Robert Horne presents the colony as healthy and productive, emphasizing its potential to attract settlers and investors (Horne, 1666). His language reflects calculated optimism rather than lived experience. Disease, isolation, and supply shortages receive little attention, despite their growing impact on colonial survival. These promotional accounts shaped expectations that settlement rarely fulfilled.

Personal accounts written by settlers expose those realities. Thomas Newe's letters from 1682 describe illness, inadequate provisions, and frustration with conditions far removed from earlier promises (Newe, 1682). Disease spread easily, medical care was scarce, and food supplies were unreliable. Survival depended on delayed shipments from England and inconsistent local production. These conditions eroded morale and heightened uncertainty within the colony.

Samuel Wilson's *An Account of the Province of Carolina* (1682) reflects similar instability. He describes economic difficulty, weak governance, and the strain placed on settlers by their environment (Wilson, 1682). His account suggests that settlement required persistence rather than confidence. For Indigenous peoples, European settlement intensified competition for land and resources while introducing unfamiliar diseases, further destabilizing established communities.

Human relationships within the colony reflected these pressures. Scarcity and isolation strained relationships among settlers, while interactions with Indigenous peoples were shaped by imbalance and necessity. Settlers depended on Indigenous knowledge to survive, even as colonization undermined Indigenous autonomy and security. Cooperation occurred alongside conflict, shaped by unequal power and competing interests.

Taken together, these primary sources reveal early Carolina as a place where ambition collided with reality. Promotional language promised opportunity, while daily life demanded hardship and endurance. These firsthand accounts preserve the voices of those who experienced settlement directly and persistence, and these documents ensure that those realities remain visible.

Works Consulted

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