

## Between “Rich Ground” and “Breakers”: The Price of Carolina’s Promise

The accounts of early Carolinians reflect the area’s economic opportunities and strategic waterways, yet early life was constrained by dangers in navigation, disease, and Indigenous cross-cultural struggles. Writers like Horne and Wilson openly wrote to attract settlers and raise land values (Salley 65), while Newe’s and Hilton’s reports provided a raw and friction-filled view of Carolina’s disease risk, conflict, and labor systems.

Although the regional environment is described as extraordinarily rich, its marshes provided significant risks. Hilton references these conditions and explains that pioneer survival depended on boating conditions, with “Sholes and Breakers... unsafe to meddle with” (Salley 43). Settlers also preferred rich inland soil, in which Horne describes the near-sea regions as “sandy and barren... but... up the River... rich ground as any in the world” (Salley 68). Similarly, Newe explains that “The land near the sea side is generally a light and sandy ground, but up in the Country they say there is very good land, and the farther up the better...” and “in the Country are furnisht with Venison, fish, and fowle by the Indians for trifles...” (Salley 182). The elements of resources in these writings brought settlers inland and started settlements such as Charles Town.

Furthermore, relationships with the Indigenous people played a significant role in colonial interactions, with trade, hostage-taking, rumor, and violence widespread among the Carolinas. Hilton frames Indigenous people as diplomatic trade partners, while Wilson and Newe highlight the militarized, fragmented, and controllable aspects of natives, with Wilson explaining that the English could “reveng’d upon their whole Nation.” (Salley 173) and Newe, highlighting how

“the Commonalty... mightily dissatisfied... [because] 3 or 4 of the great ones... furnished the Indians with arms and ammunitions.” (Salley 183-184). These views of how the Indigenous population gained militarization gave early settlers insecurity about the threat of attacks that could deter would-be settlers.

Despite potential safety risks, promotion leaned hard on healthfulness as Wilson claims, such as when he describes “out of a Family... never less than twelve Persons, not one hath died... nine years... but what is more, not one hath been sick in all that time...” (Salley 169) This quote creates a fantasy representation of health in the Carolinas, which was targeted at convincing prospective settlers who valued a refuge from Europe’s ailments. In stark contrast, Newe explains that in the migration to the Carolinas, passengers fell “much troubled with the scurvy... we lost 3.” (Salley 181) and that in terms of sickness, “the most have a seasoning, but few dye of it.” (Salley 183). These honest views showcase the truth of how sickness was normalized and harsh for many en route to the region, seen almost as a routine in survival.

Surviving in pioneer conditions additionally required significant resources, often supported by Indigenous trade. Newe, for example, highlights that “all things... very dear” in town, referencing that cheap resources could be found locally with native trade. Wilson adds to these requirements, providing a tool list that highlights early pioneers' emphasis on developing essential structures, emphasizing how preparedness was a need in the New World.

Regardless of these concerns, recruitment strategically promised liberty, land, and export benefits for those who chose Carolina. Yet, the underlying “fine print” referenced the need for

militarization and coerced labor, ultimately propelling the systems that created Indigenous and African enslavement. Horne, for example, sold the privileges that came with immigration while requiring settlers be “armed with a good Musquet...Powder...Bullet, and six Months Provision.” (Salley 71), illustrating how power dynamics in the region could lead to the need for violence and defense. In addition, Wilson explains how to buy “Negro slaves (without which a Planter can never do any great matter).” (Salley 174), which framed slavery as a necessity.

The abundance of Carolina was real; however, the survival, power, and labor systems required were cutthroat and structured daily life. European settlers faced navigation hardships, scurvy, Indigenous threats, and fears of violence. Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, dealt with the addition of arms trading, mounting settlement pressures, and the possibility of war. Even with the promotional nature of early texts, the details of everyday struggles document the cost of colonization.

## Works Cited

“Narratives of Early Carolina, 1650-1708 : Salley, A. S. (Alexander Samuel), 1871-1961 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive.” Internet Archive, 2026, [archive.org/details/narrearlycarolina00sallrich/page/60/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/narrearlycarolina00sallrich/page/60/mode/2up).