

Before Carolina

Early Inhabitants

For thousands of years, the land we know as South Carolina has attracted people who found its climate and geography inviting from the mountains to the sea. Evidence of Native American habitation in this region dates back 15,000 years.

In the 16th century, European contact introduced diseases to Native Americans that decimated entire villages. During his 1540 expedition to Cofitachequi, located near present-day Camden, explorer Hernan de Soto found evidence of villages that were nearly wiped out from epidemics.

While historians do not know the exact number of Native American groups that existed in South Carolina at the time of European settlement, they estimate a native population of approximately 15,000 in the year 1600.



Cassique of Kiawah
South Carolina Historical Society

Early English settlers reported that the Kiawah greeted them with:
“Hiddy doddy Comorado Angles”
The settlers believed the interpretation to be, “English very good friends.”

Great Catawba Trading Path



Great Catawba Trading Path
South Carolina Historical Society

Native Americans once occupied much of present-day South Carolina. An extensive network of trails used for hunting and trading connected their homelands. One series of paths, known as the Great Catawba Trading Path, linked the Catawba villages in what is now York County to the coast.

After European settlers established Charles Town, this path would become a major trading route between the Catawbas and the Carolinians. It also served as a highway for European adventures into the interior.

Natural World

For Europeans, South Carolina's natural world was a surprising, occasionally dangerous place, home to species of plants and animals that were unknown in Europe. The now-extinct Carolina parakeet, the only parrot species native to the eastern United States, could be found throughout the area. Bison roamed the piedmont region until the 1760s. Naturalists would later send descriptions, illustrations, and specimens of the various plants and animals back to Europe for study.

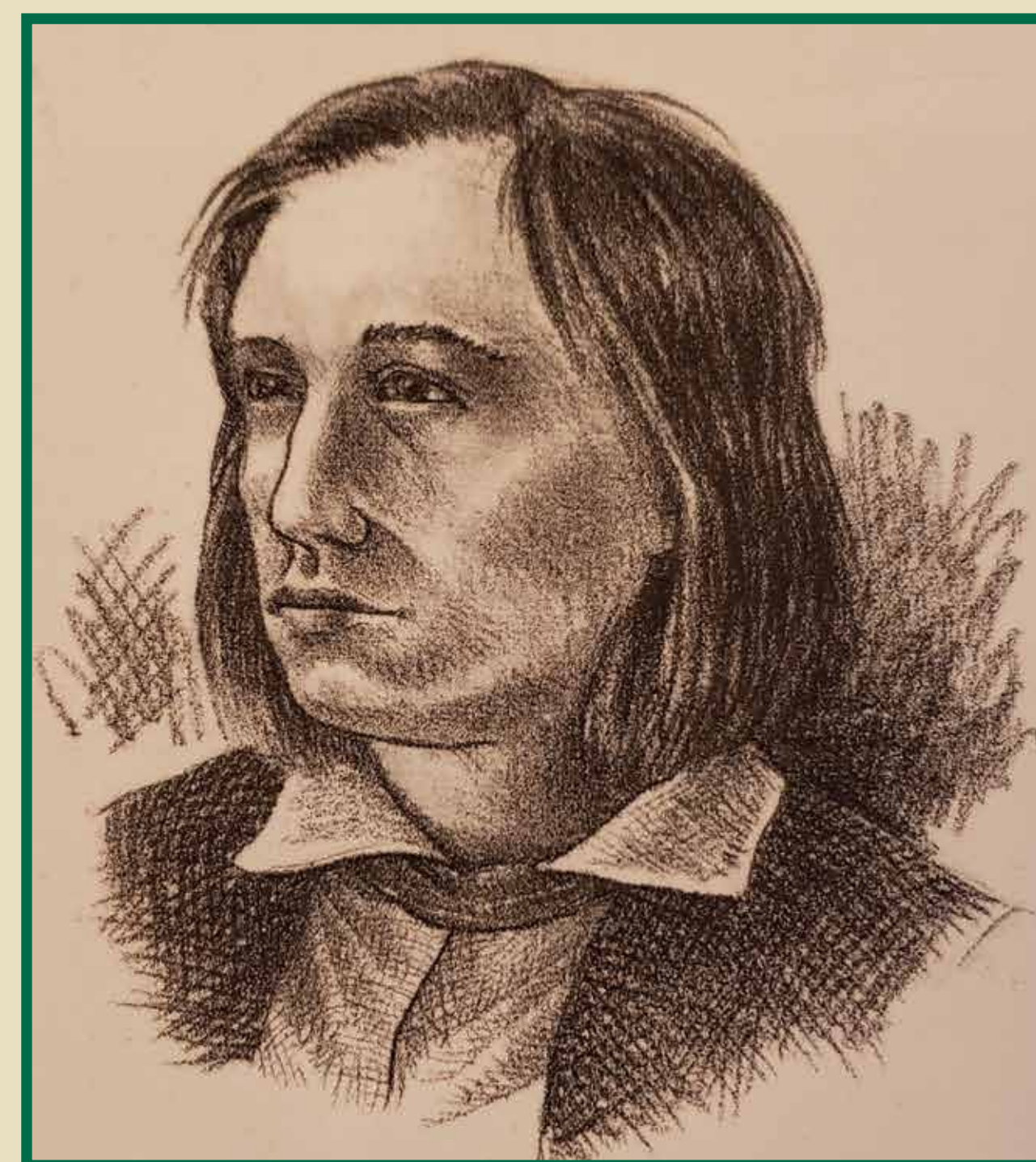


Carolina Parakeet, 1731
Mark Catesby, Artist

Europeans altered the environment of South Carolina immensely. Some animal species suffered as a result of hunting and environmental changes. Europeans also introduced new species to Carolina. For example, while red foxes are common throughout South Carolina, they are not a native species. In the 1600s, Europeans brought foxes to America during their expeditions.

One Man's Venture

Henry Woodward was an English settler who first arrived in South Carolina in 1666, prior to the settling of Charles Town. Woodward was one of the first Europeans to traverse the entire length of the Great Catawba Trading Path. He also spent a year in the vicinity of Port Royal, learning Native American languages and establishing trade contacts.

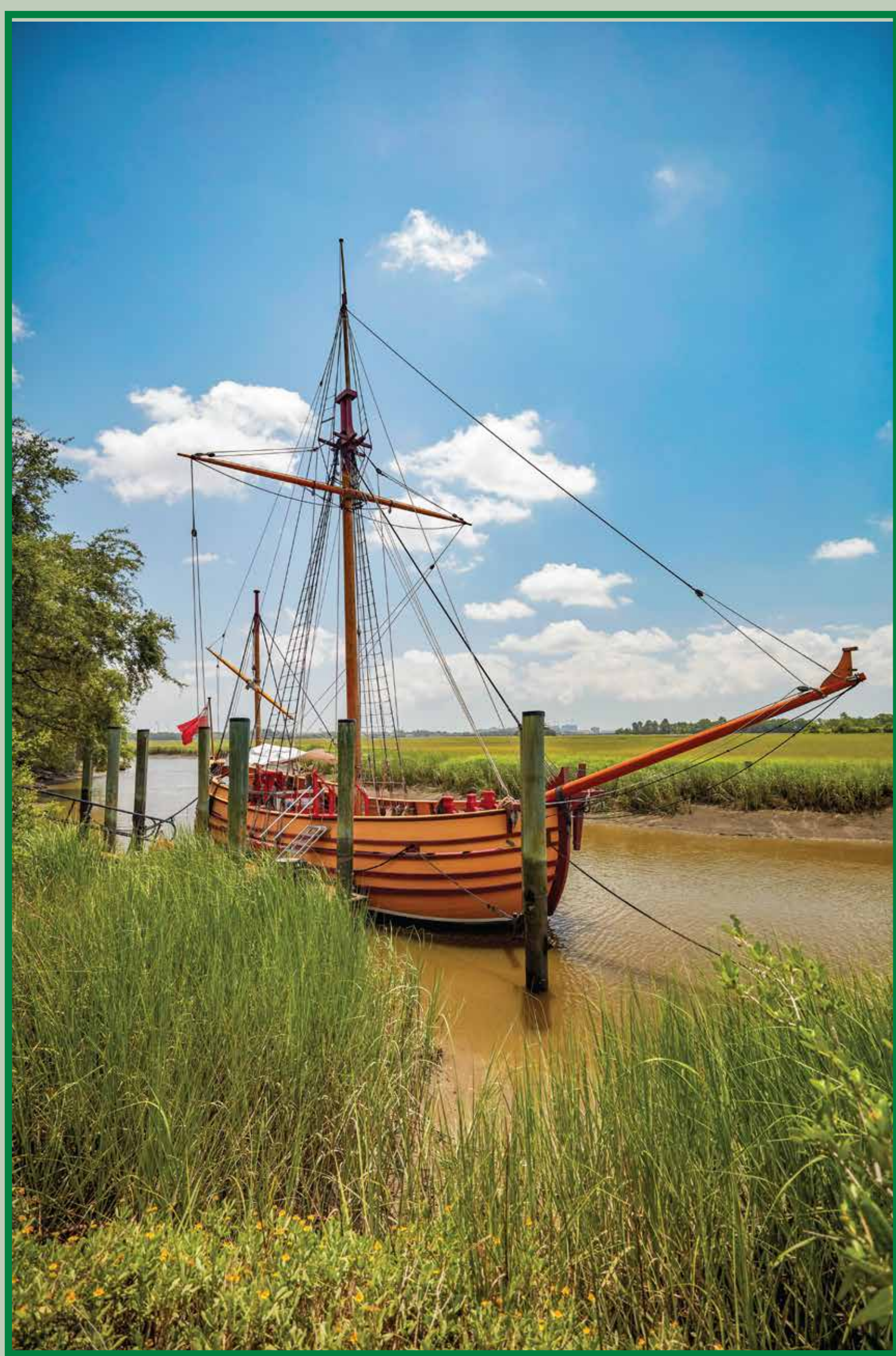


Henry Woodward
South Carolina Historical Society



A New Map of Carolina, 1685, John Thornton, South Carolina Historical Society

Landing: 1670



The Adventure
Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site

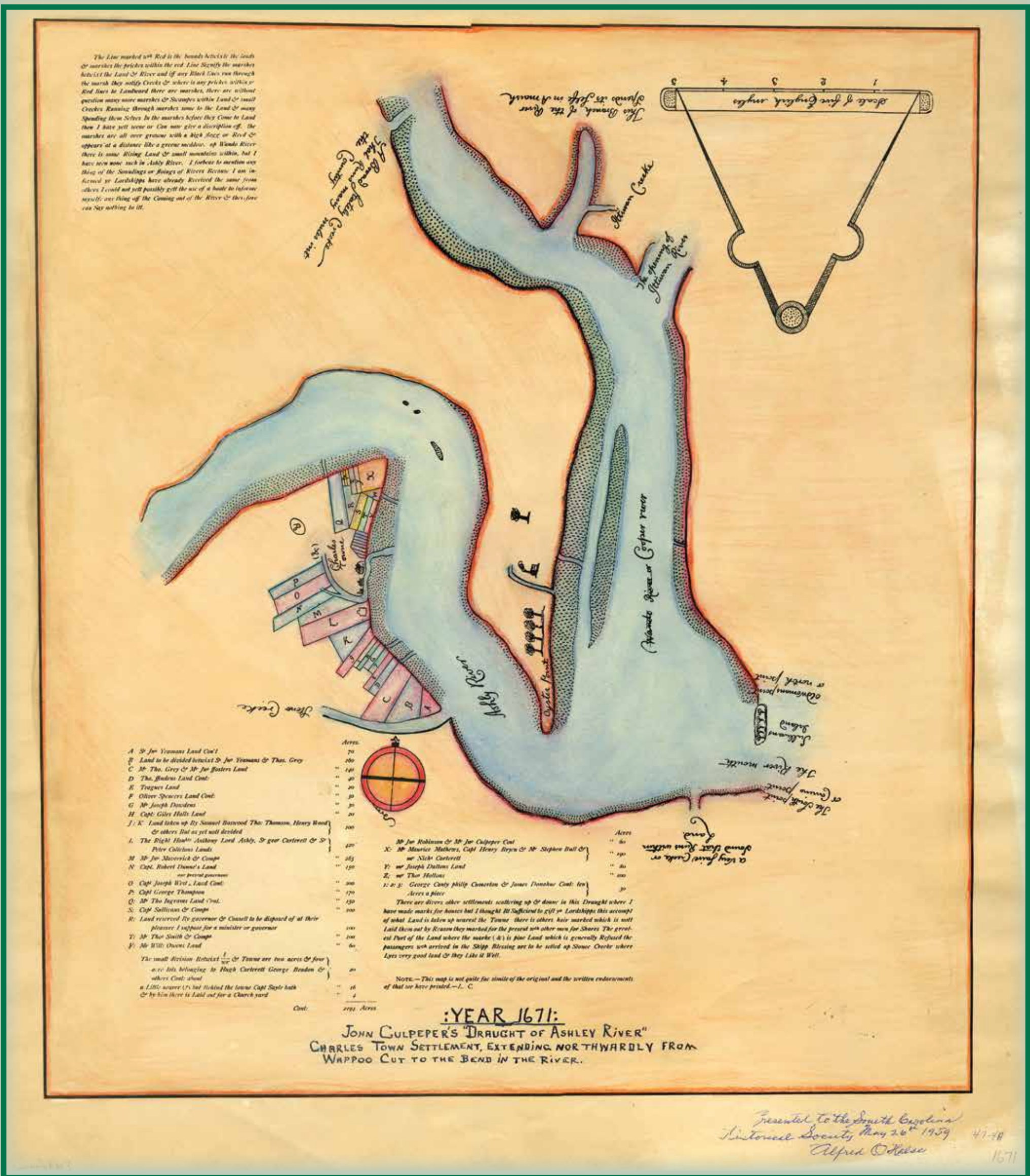
The Arrival

Upon arrival in the Carolina colony in 1670, approximately 130 settlers disembarked from the ship, *Carolina*. Native Americans, led by the cassique of Kiawah, met the ships.

Although the Lords Proprietors had anticipated creating their settlement at Port Royal, the cassique convinced them instead to travel north to Albemarle Point on the Ashley River, the location of modern-day Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site.

The Settlement

Relatively secure, Albemarle Point was surrounded by water on three sides and invisible from the harbor. Still, the Carolinians were concerned about potential attacks from Native Americans and Spaniards, so they began building fortifications almost immediately to protect the new settlement.



Alfred O. Halsey's recreation of John Culpeper's 1671 map, "Draught of Ashley River," 1959
South Carolina Historical Society Collection

Who Arrived

Spanish

Spanish exploration of the Americas began in the 16th century, fueled by the desire to expand their empire and search for riches. In 1540, explorer Hernan de Soto journeyed through La Florida to the chieftdom of Cofitachequi along the Wateree River. Though there were no Spanish settlers remaining in South Carolina when the English founded Charles Town, Spanish mistreatment of the Native Americans left their mark on these early explorations.

English

English settlers sailed for the Carolina colony in the 17th century. The Lords Proprietors, eight noblemen who had received a grant for Carolina from the king of England, owned and governed the colony. Both the proprietors and the settlers had hopes of accumulating wealth from Carolina's rich natural resources such as lumber and deerskins. The proprietors established a land-grant system, giving those looking for economic opportunity an incentive to make the voyage to Carolina.

French Huguenots

French Huguenots, or French Protestants, began coming to South Carolina in 1680, shortly after English settlement. At the time, the French government was persecuting the Huguenots, causing thousands to flee. Many escaped as refugees to other European countries, but Huguenots also came to South Carolina in large numbers, drawn by the promise of religious freedom and economic opportunity.

Africans

Africans came to South Carolina involuntarily. Initially, English colonists brought slaves to Carolina from the West Indies, often with their owners. Later, the slave trade, run primarily by English merchants, brought tremendous profit to those involved as they captured Africans, transported them across the Atlantic Ocean, and sold them into slavery in South Carolina. Slave owners forced enslaved people to work in a variety of jobs, both on the plantations and in urban homes.

One Man's Venture

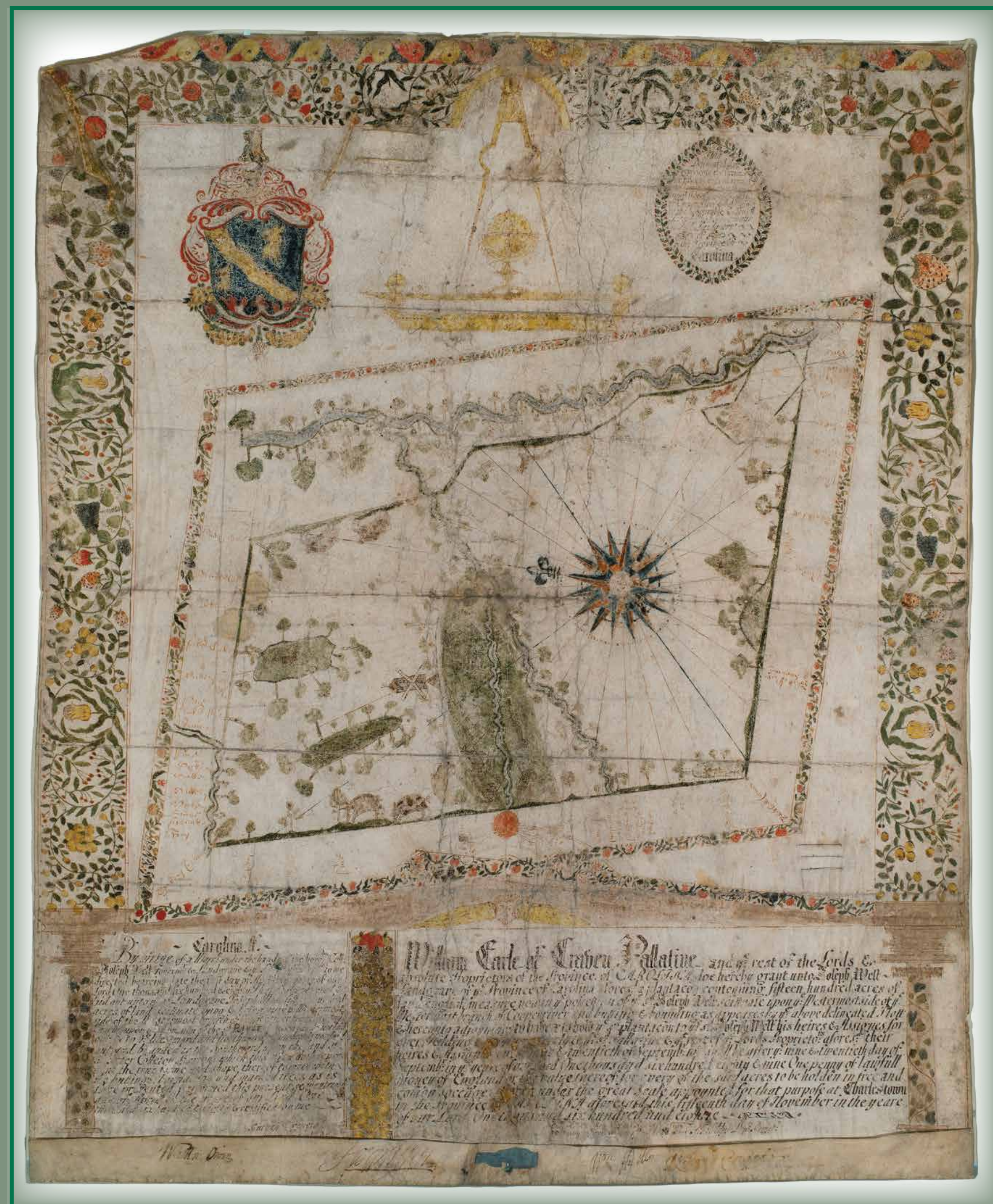
In 1670, shortly after the English settlers made landfall, Henry Woodward traveled to the chieftdom of Cofitachiqui, where he reportedly formed an alliance and established a trade agreement between the emperor of Cofitachiqui and the newly arrived English. Woodward became a key figure in creating relationships between the Native Americans and the English.



New Realities

Mapping the Land

A glimpse of early Carolina comes from Joseph West, the colony's second governor, who created this elaborate plat recording his grant of 1,500 acres from the Lords Proprietors. West's land was situated on Biggin Creek, a branch of the Cooper River, in an area that was soon settled by French Huguenots.



Joseph West Plat, 1680
South Carolina Historical Society Collection

In 1686, West sold the tract to James Le Bas, a prominent Huguenot settler. West's plat is filled with images of lowcountry plants and animals, intricate cartographic elements, and structures.

What's in a name?

During the first century of Charles Town's existence, its spelling varied. Sometimes, writers added an "e" to the end, making it "Towne."

Occasionally, the name appeared as one word rather than two. The most commonly found spelling was as two words with no ending "e": Charles Town.

After the Revolutionary War, the city became known as Charleston.

Steady Growth

After a decade of steady growth, the settlement of Charles Town moved from Albemarle Point to a spot on the other side of the Ashley River known as Oyster Point in 1680. The colonists fortified the peninsular area into a walled city that could be defended from potential invasions.



Crisp Map of Charleston, 1711, Library of Congress

New Challenges

As the colony's populations increased, issues of sanitation and disease control arose as well. With each new ship arriving in the port from Europe and Africa came the potential for a new outbreak in the city. In 1697, smallpox left over 200 dead in Charles Town. Outbreaks of diseases affected not only the colonists, but wiped out 55 to 90 percent of certain Native American tribes.

One Man's Venture

Through the 1670s, Henry Woodward continued to create trade agreements and alliances with various Native American groups that would benefit the English. In 1674, he made an arrangement with the Westos, a tribe of Native Americans located along the Savannah River, that led to a large increase in the deerskin trade, a source of economic opportunity for many colonists. The deal lasted until the Westo War in 1680.



Emanuel Bowen, The town and harbour of Charles Town in South Carolina, 1747, South Carolina Historical Society Collection

Beyond Charles Town

Encouraged Immigration

The Lords Proprietors actively encouraged immigration, which contributed to Charles Town's growth. Colonists such as Thomas Nairne began writing pamphlets and letters focusing on the economic opportunities, religious freedom, and the availability of land in Carolina. Often printed in both English and French, these promotional materials encouraged numerous Huguenots to make the voyage.

"This province is capable of containing above 60 times the Number of its present inhabitants; and there is no Place in the Continent of America where people can transport themselves to greater Advantage."

~Thomas Nairne, A Letter from South Carolina, 1710

Agriculture

As Huguenots made their way to the Carolina colony, many spread beyond Charles Town, settling on lands along the Santee River. Here, they became planters alongside the English, amassing huge amounts of wealth through the production of rice.

Rice became the primary crop of South Carolina, bringing unprecedented wealth to the colony's European settlers. The agricultural and mechanical knowledge, and labor needed to cultivate the rice, however, came from enslaved Africans who brought the skills of rice production from their homes in Africa. The enslaved Africans, known as the Gullah people, preserved much of their cultural heritage, bringing their food, artwork, and language to the colony.



Rice Hope Plantation, 1905
South Carolina Historical Society Collection

Expansion

By the early 18th century, settlements in South Carolina extended beyond Charles Town. Colonists established locations such as Fort Congaree, found at the intersection of the Congaree River and Congaree Creek near modern-day Cayce, to serve as trading posts.

The settling of Charles Town in 1670 as well as the expansion of European settlement in the following decades was not without its struggles and missteps. However, it led to a city and state rich in heritage, unique customs, and diverse cultures, setting the course for South Carolina's future as a player on a 21st-century stage.

One Man's Venture

In the early 1680s, Henry Woodward faced criminal accusations in Carolina for his role in the trade struggles between Carolinians and the Proprietors. After Woodward traveled to London to plead his case, the Lords Proprietors gave him a full pardon as well as permission to conduct an excursion to the Blue Ridge Mountains, continuing his westward exploration of Carolina.

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