

South Carolina History and Research

Notes from an informal talk given by Brent H. Holcomb at the Charleston BSGR Convention, June 2000

Carolina was started as a proprietary state in 1670. Lord proprietors owned the state. South Carolina was then the southwestern quarter of present-day South Carolina, and the settlement was first in that region.

The first settlers were English or of English origin, but a good many came from the Island of Barbados in the West Indies. They spoke English. However, very early other peoples started coming to South Carolina. A fairly small number of French Huguenots came in 1682, but increased their numbers very quickly thereafter.

There are two very good books about the early settlement of South Carolina. Agnes Leland Baldwin, *First Settlers of South Carolina*¹ lists every name from the records up to the year 1700. It's a veritable telephone book for Charleston of the period, as it has in it every name, even if the person is only a witness to a legal document. The other book, by Charles H. Lesser, *South Carolina Begins: The Records of a Proprietary Colony, 1663-1721*,² explains the records of that time period and gets you started in researching in South Carolina.

Finding that the proprietary system didn't work well, in 1719 South Carolina became a Royal Colony under King George II. (It took until about 1729 before this was really enforced, however.) In that time period and until 1780, **every record** in South Carolina was recorded in **Charleston** - there was no other court house of record in the state. If you lived in Chester in 1770, to record a deed you had to go to Charleston. You could prove it before a Justice of the Peace in Chester, but someone had to take it to Charleston to be recorded. The *Register to Main Events of Charleston* books are in a special room at Archives in Columbia, which has temperature, control and TV cameras providing security, but they are in good condition and available to researchers. All the wills and estates recorded in Charleston up to 1781 are also there and you can write or get on line to ask for information.

When the Royal province was set up, the township scheme was established. Townships were set up all over South Carolina where the people had settled and these were strictly by groups - the French in one township, the Scotch-Irish in another, a Welch township up near Darlington County for the Baptists who came from

Pennsylvania and Delaware. There was a later township in the 1740s through 60s of Germans on a fork of the Saluda River in what is now Lexington and Newberry counties which gave it the name of the "Dutch fork." If a survey was done to give someone land and a part of the plat went across a township boundary into another, that part was lost. Township boundaries were very strictly adhered to.

Computer Output Microfilm Index (COM). If you want to do basic research in the Colonial period in South Carolina, there's an index, Computer Output Microfilm Index (COM) in the Archives, which is a record of all the deeds, all the grants, all the plats, all the land memorials up until the Revolution. Even if only an adjacent land owner, the name is indexed. There might not be a record of the abutter's own land, but his name as an abutter will be there, locating it. All plats are also arranged under the water course — if looking for a plat on Fishing Creek, every plat is listed there chronologically from the first to the last.

North Carolina Boundary Settlement. North Carolina was once part of the same Royal province as South Carolina, but they had totally different systems from the beginning. North Carolina had a county system which started out as precincts. It had Courts of Record in the counties where plats could be recorded. South Carolina had four counties which didn't function as counties: Craven, Berkeley, Colleton and Granville. Government and records were in Charleston. In 1764 the border between the Carolinas was surveyed for the first time, and when it was surveyed again in 1772, the North Carolina line was found to be twenty-two miles too far south. North Carolina lost its Tyron County, and the court house for the county was suddenly in the new York County, South Carolina, and had to be moved north. So, in looking for ancestors in York or Chester, Spartanburg, Union or even Lancaster counties, also look in Tyron County, North Carolina for records prior to that time as that's where the court house was. Some people got new grants and deeds from South Carolina at the time, but having a county system as did North Carolina, look for the records there.

Marriage Records. North Carolina was also very different from South Carolina in that they had a marriage bond law from 1741. You could get married by a bond, which was a signed legal document stating there was no legal impediment to the marriage, or you could be married by bans, stating intent to marry. You

¹ Easley, South Carolina: Southern Historical Press, 1985.

² Columbia: The South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1995.

could then go to a justice of the peace or church and be married. There's no record of either bonds or bans unless in the church records. In South Carolina, the parishes took care of the marriages, and the parish registers have many marriages in them (if there is a register). The current marriage license law dates only from 1 July 1911. The best place to find a marriage record before that is in the newspapers. The *Charleston Ledger* started in 1850-1856 and other newspaper records have been published in various books.³

The Council Journal Records. In South Carolina settlers had to appear before the Council to petition for their land. Land was given away on the bounty, and settlers were also given money for supplies based on how many were in the family. Originally fifty acres of land was given per person, but in 1755 this was altered to one hundred acres for the head of the family and fifty acres for every other person in the family - wife, children, servants - so if the petitioner had a large family, he got a large tract of land. This land was free from what was called "quit rents" for several years, to get the farm started - vacant land couldn't be taxed and was no good to the government.

Many Scotch-Irish came into South Carolina in the 1760s and 1770s, drawn by the free land and also by religious toleration. The only ship lists we have for this period are for people who applied for land. They give the names and ages of the children in a lot of cases, and while these are not exactly passenger lists, as people who came in on the ships who did not apply for land are not listed, they do list those seeking land. These are in the Council Journals, and Janie Revill published these,⁴ and Jean Stephenson published a book on the five shiploads brought to South Carolina by Rev. Martin.⁵ [Holcomb] went through all of the Council

³ *Marriage and Death Notices from Baptist Newspapers of South Carolina 1835-1865; Marriage and Death Notices from Baptist Newspapers of South Carolina, Volume 2, 1866-1887; Marriage and Death Notices from Columbia, South Carolina Newspapers 1838-1860; Marriage and Death Notices from Upper South Carolina Newspapers 1843-1865; Marriage and Death Notices from the Pendleton South Carolina Messenger, 1807-1851; Marriage, Death and Estate Notices from Georgetown, South Carolina Newspapers 1791-1861*, all available from *South Carolina Magazine of Ancestral Research*, P.O. Box 21766, Columbia, South Carolina 29221.

⁴ *Revill, Janie, A Compilation of the Original Lists of Protestant Immigrants to South Carolina 1763-1773* (Baltimore: Clearfield Publishing Company, reprinted 1996).

⁵ *Stephenson, Jean, Scotch-Irish Migration to South Carolina, 1772* (Baltimore: Clearfield Publishing Company, reprinted 1999).

Journals, 1734 to 1775, and these are now all available in print in seven volumes.⁶ The petitions for land found in the Council Journals are probably the best source for immigration and migration in the Colonial period. Many petitions indicate that the petitioners are foreign protestants who came on the encouragement given by South Carolina. Some petitions indicate migration to South Carolina from other provinces; some indicate slave holdings of low-country planters; still others give information on persons who died before their land titles could be perfected and the heirs are named. In the period covered, the first petitions for land in the newly established townships and other areas are to be found: Orangeburg, Amelia, Williamsburg, Purrysburg, the Welch Tract, Saxe Gotha, Kingston, Fredericksburg, Queensboro. In the 1760s and 1770s some passenger lists were transcribed into the journals.

The vast majority of Scotch-Irish settlers in upper South Carolina had come through the port of Philadelphia or other northern ports and had been in Philadelphia for a while and then followed the Great Wagon Road south. The free land and the religious toleration drew them. In Pennsylvania they sometimes had been unable to get title to any land because the land office there was closed when William Penn died, and not opened until his inheriting grandsons came of age. These "squatters" or "presumptive settlers" just sat on land hoping to get title to it. There's probably no record of these people. If they were members of a church, there might be mention of them when they left the church to start south, but there are no deeds unless they managed to buy Pennsylvania land from someone. Some churches noted letters of dismissal in their church records as families left their churches to go south to settle on free land they could own.

The South Carolina Department of Archives and History Center is located at 8301 Parklane Road, Columbia, South Carolina 29223; their telephone is (803) 896-6100 (FAX (803) 896-6198. Information about other genealogical and historical societies in South Carolina is available on USGenWeb.com.

⁶ *Holcomb, Brent H., Petitions for Land from the South Carolina Council Journals, Volume I: 1734/4-1748; Volume II: 1748-1752; Volume III: 1752-1753; Volume IV: 1754-1756; Volume V: 1757-1765; Volume VI: 1766-1770; Volume VII: 1771-1777* (Columbia, South Carolina: Magazine of Ancestral Research, 1996-1999). All of the petitions are properly referenced so that copies of the appropriate pages from the original journals may be obtained.