A royal colony

BY DAVID WALBERT

By 1729, there were settlements on each of North Carolina's major river systems. But the biggest settlements, on the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, were a long way from South Carolina's major settlement of Charles Town (Charleston). (More about the map)

The story of Carolina’s first fifty years is one of turmoil — political conflict, corrupt officials, unpaid taxes, incompetent proprietors, open rebellion, angry Indians, and rapacious pirates. But at the same time, the colonists were building a new society along the coast, with farms, towns, and quietly functioning local government. In 1729, North Carolina was taken over by the king, the turmoil quieted down, and for the next few decades, colonists enjoyed relative peace and stability.

Two Carolinas

Since the 1660s, the Proprietors had recognized that one governor and one assembly couldn’t manage a colony as big as Carolina — not when the settlements at Albemarle, Cape Fear, and Charles Town were so far apart and transportation up and down the coast was so difficult. In 1691, the Proprietors appointed a governor for all of Carolina and a deputy governor for its northern half, and this arrangement provided better administration. In 1712, North and South Carolina were officially divided.

The English government, though, was unhappy with its proprietary colonies. King and Parliament wanted taxes collected, colonists defended, and order maintained — just as most residents of North Carolina did — and they didn’t believe that the various proprietors were managing their colonies properly. In 1719, South Carolina, which had more resources than North Carolina and was therefore more valuable to England, was taken back from the Proprietors and made a royal colony. While a proprietary colony was ruled by proprietors or owners in the king’s place, a royal colony was ruled directly by the king. The king, or his officials, appointed the colony’s governor and had the right to approve (or disapprove) its laws.

In 1729, seven of the eight Lords Proprietors agreed to sell their shares of North Carolina to King George II, and North Carolina, too, became a royal colony. One proprietor, though, held out: John Carteret, the descendant of Sir George Carteret, one of the original Lords Proprietors. Carteret continued to own one-eighth of the colony’s land, though he had no say in its government. Carteret would later inherit the title Earl Granville, and the management of his land, known as the Granville District, would cause problems for colonists later on.

North Carolina under royal rule

Arthur Dobbs, one of five royal governors of North Carolina, served from 1754 to 1764. For much of his term in office, he was able to serve the interests of the Crown and keep colonists happy, as well. Creator unknown.

Now that the king’s officials appointed provincial governors, North Carolina’s government became more stable and effective after 1729. But many precedents had been established during the years of chaos that would continue to define the colony. The Assembly had gained a great deal of power at the expense of weak governors, and would keep that power throughout the colonial period. County and town governments, and especially courts, were what most people relied on and had the most contact with. North Carolinians had come to rely on themselves and on local officials whom they knew and trusted, and they had come to associate high-level officials with incompetence and corruption — an association they would keep throughout the eighteenth century.

In 1729, North Carolina had about 36,000 inhabitants, most of whom lived in the Albemarle region. Small towns, many of which were too small to be incorporated, had become the focus of local government, where courts were held. When towns grew larger and were incorporated, gaining their own municipal governments, they became homes to merchants and craftspeople and centers for further settlement. Settlement gradually spread down the coast, reaching the Cape Fear by the mid-1720s. Most people continued to live in rough, poor conditions, but they seem to have been relatively content.

By the 1740s, settlers were arriving in the Piedmont from Europe or from northern colonies, bringing with them new cultures, languages, and religions. And as the economy of the more established Coastal Plain grew, colonists began to import more slaves from Africa.

Governing the Piedmont

BY DAVID WALBERT

As settlers spread across the Piedmont, the colonial government struggled — and often failed — to keep up with them. Residents of the Piedmont grew to resent those failures. In the 1760s, groups of settlers calling themselves Regulators signed petitions, refused to pay taxes, and ultimately used violence in an effort to force the colonial government to treat them fairly. But the seeds of that conflict were sown much earlier in the colonial period.

The Granville District



map showing the Granville District of colonial North Carolina

The Granville District, under the control of John Carteret, Earl Granville, included nearly the northern half of North Carolina.

When North Carolina became a royal colony in 1729, one of the Lords Proprietors, John Carteret, Earl Granville, refused to sell his share back to the crown. He was given the northern portion of North Carolina, a 60-mile wide strip of land south of the Virginia border, as his property. Although he had no say in the colonial government, he continued to collect quitrents and taxes. The region under his control — which included as much as two-thirds of the colony’s population in 1729 — was known as the Granville District.

Lord Granville sent agents to prepare rolls, or lists, of everyone living on his land and to collect quitrents and taxes. But these agents often failed to do their job, which meant that Granville didn’t actually collect much money. Worse, it was difficult for settlers to obtain titles to their land — legal documents stating that they owned the land they lived on. The District’s land office in Edenton was not open on a regular schedule, and his agents kept poor records or overcharged settlers and pocketed the extra money. It wasn’t clear which lands had been granted and which were still available. As a result, squatters occupied much of the District’s territory, living on land and farming it without clear legal title to it.

The arrangement frustrated not only settlers trying to buy land but also the colonial government, which had only limited authority over the Granville District. When residents of the District refused to pay taxes because they were being treated unfairly, people in the southern part of the colony refused to pay for the entire cost of running the government. Representatives of the Albemarle and from the area around Wilmington fought in the colonial Assembly, tying up the government.

Although the problems of the Granville District affected most of the colony, they hurt worst in the Piedmont, where settlers needed the land office to grant them titles to newly occupied land. The difficulty of travel between the coast and the Piedmont also meant that the colonial government had even less control over officials and agents there than in the east, and Piedmont residents found it difficult or impossible to have their problems resolved. Not until the Revolution, when the new state of North Carolina took over the Granville District, would these problems be resolved.

New counties

Each county had its own government, just as counties do today, with a county seat where courts were held and where government offices were located. Settlers had to travel to the county seat for court days and to register wills or deeds, and in large counties, travel on horseback or on foot to the county seat might be quite a burden. Additionally, representation in the colonial Assembly was divided by county, and as population in western counties grew rapidly, westerners might not be fairly represented in the colonial government. Eastern representatives were mainly concerned with helping their part of the colony, and if they dominated the Assembly, the concerns of westerners wouldn’t be addressed. And, of course, easterners were perfectly happy with the way things were — they didn’t necessarily want to share power with the west.

For these reasons, it was important for the Assembly to establish new counties promptly when old counties grew too large. By the 1750s and 1760s, though, the population was growing faster than the Assembly could, or would, create new counties. This, too, led to resentment in the Piedmont.

**Read the section “A Royal Colony” (down to Governing the Piedmont.) Write down whether the statement is true or false and correct the false statements by rewriting the complete sentence correctly on your paper. Do not write on this sheet.**

\_\_\_\_1. Since the 1660s, the Proprietors had realized that one governor could not control both the northern and southern part of the Carolina Colony.

\_\_\_\_2. The most important early settlements were Albemarle area, Cape Fear area, and Charles Towne.

\_\_\_\_3. In 1691, the Proprietors put a deputy governor in charge of the southern part of the Carolina Colony.

\_\_\_\_4. North and South Carolina were separated before the Tuscarora War.

\_\_\_\_5. South Carolina was made a royal colony before North Carolina.

\_\_\_\_6. North Carolina was more valuable to England than South Carolina.

\_\_\_\_7. A royal colony was ruled by Parliament.

\_\_\_\_8. The colonial Assembly had very little power during the colonial period.

\_\_\_\_9. When North Carolina became a royal colony, settlers greatly relied on the newly appointed royal officials in running the colony.

**Read “Governing the Colony”. Answer the following questions on your paper. Answer in complete sentences.**

10. How do you think the transition from a proprietary colony to a royal colony might affect North Carolina in the fifty years after 1729?

11. Why do you think that John Carteret, Earl Granville refused to sell his portion of Carolina to the crown?

12. What were the reasons for splitting the Carolina into North and South Carolina?

13. Why did the make first South Carolina and then North Carolina into royal colonies?

14. What was the Granville District and why do you think it became important in the years following 1729?

15. What are some differences between royal and proprietary colonies?

16. Why did the other seven Lords Proprietors sell their land in Carolina back to the Crown?

17. Why might the Assembly not want to consent to adding new counties to the colony?

18. Why did some of the eastern counties subdivide?

19. What was the outcome of unfair representation in the Assembly?

20. If you were given the challenge to come up with a way to even out the representation between Albemarle and Cape Fear (and the backcountry) what would you do to keep everyone willing to work with you, but also have fair representation.