Designing Carolina: The construction of an early American social and geographical landscape, 1670-1719

Meaghan N. Duff, College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Date Awarded
1998

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Department
History

Advisor
James Axtell

Abstract
This study explores the promotion, population and settlement of the Carolina lowcountry and evaluates the colony's pioneer years, the period before an English-dominated plantation society achieved supremacy. Many designers participated in the construction of proprietary South Carolina's social and geographical landscapes. The explorers and propagandists who first characterized the colony for European audiences developed the region in the minds of potential emigrants. Their recruitment campaigns determined in part the people who colonized the province. The Lords Proprietors and their agents, who devised an elaborate settlement program set forth in the Fundamental Constitutions and other land policies, influenced how Carolina evolved physically and socially. The planters and surveyors who lived and worked within this system reshaped it to serve their own ends, thus altering the complexion of the colonial lowcountry landscape. Finally, the European and Indian cartographers who drew maps of the southeastern region created and interpreted the imagined and actual geography of Carolina.

Despite the small number of private papers surviving from the proprietary period, extant records reveal a considerable amount about white Carolinians' approaches to and occupation of lowcountry lands. The sources examined in this study include exploratory narratives and promotional literature, correspondence and journals of colonial officials, land warrants and grants, surveyors' guidebooks and plats, and historical maps of southeastern North America. Indeed, the public records dating from 1670 to 1710 are particularly suited to a geographic interpretation of South Carolina. In one sense, the story of South Carolina's first settlement and initial development suffers from the tendency of scholars to read history backwards from the fully-evolved plantation societies of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and to apply predominately economic interpretations to the colony's earliest years. This dissertation takes another approach and concentrates on the creation of the colony both in perception and practice as the first comprehensive analysis of the conceptualization, peopling, and construction of social and geographical landscapes in South Carolina, it integrates the history of a single southern colony within the broader contexts of early American and Atlantic world histories.

DOI
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-gv7s-tx49

Rights
© The Author

Recommended Citation