Settlement of the Coastal Plain, 1650-1775

From the 1650s to the 1770s, the Coastal Plain Region of the land we now call North Carolina changed greatly. European American settlers began arriving, pushing back the Native Americans who had lived there for thousands of years.

The Albemarle

The first part of North Carolina to be settled by European Americans was the Albemarle. The Albemarle extends from the border with Virginia to the north shore of the Albemarle Sound.

After the failed Roanoke colonies in the 1580s, the English focused on colonizing present-day Virginia. But in the mid-1600s, Virginians began exploring and acquiring land in the Albemarle area. Why did they begin settling there? Most hoped to find better farmland and to make money by trading with the Native Americans.

In 1663 King Charles II granted Carolina to eight prominent Englishmen, who were called the Lords Proprietors of Carolina. Settlement was slow in the first decades of the Lords Proprietors' rule. High taxes, uncertainty about land titles, attacks by Native Americans, and inefficient government all discouraged immigration and settlement.

The difficulty of traveling into Carolina also discouraged immigration. The Outer Banks, which are barrier islands along the coast, were dangerous to ships and discouraged immigration by sea. Many ships ran aground in the shallow waters near these islands. The Great Dismal Swamp, poor roads, and rivers that were difficult to navigate also made traveling difficult.

But settlers did find ways to migrate into the area. Many from Virginia traveled by land or journeyed up the Elizabeth and Nansemond Rivers and down the Chowan River. Others may have come to Carolina by ship, sailing from other colonies along the Atlantic coast and passing through the Outer Banks at Currituck and Roanoke Inlets.

The Middle Coastal Plain

St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Built 1734Frailey, Zach. February 15, 2011. Bath, North Carolina. "St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Built 1734."

In the late 1600s some settlers began crossing the Albemarle Sound to settle in the middle Coastal Plain, which stretches from the Albemarle Sound to present-day Duplin and Onslow Counties. By 1691 they had settled along the Pamlico River in Bath County.

More settlers traveled down the coast to settle in present-day Craven County by 1703, Carteret County by 1708, and Onslow County by 1714. These settlers included people from the Albemarle, Virginia, Maryland, and New England as well as immigrants from England. Like those who settled in the Albemarle, these people hoped to profit by farming the colony's fertile land and by trading with the Native Americans.

French, German, and Swiss people also settled in the middle Coastal Plain. Many French Huguenots had settled in Virginia. But as the population in Virginia grew, land became more scarce. As a result, some Huguenots moved to Carolina. One group settled at the head of Pamlico Sound in 1690, and another settled along the Trent River around 1707 or 1708.

Swiss people and Germans from the Palatinate also came to present-day North Carolina. The Swiss were fleeing religious persecution, and the Germans were fleeing war, cold winters, and poverty. In 1710, under the direction of Baron Christoph von Graffenried, the Swiss and Germans created and settled the town of New Bern and other areas near the joining of the Neuse and Trent Rivers.

The settlement of New Bern may have sparked the Tuscarora Indian War (1711–1714), in which the Tuscarora Indians were defeated. Immigration to the middle Coastal Plain increased afterward because the war reduced the threat of Indian attacks on settlers.

The Cape Fear

In the mid-1720s, the first permanent settlers arrived in the area around the lower Cape Fear River. Their arrival was due mainly to the efforts of South Carolina planter Maurice Moore and North Carolina governor George Burrington. Moore had come to North Carolina to help fight the Tuscarora Indians. He became interested in settling in the Cape Fear area and encouraged others in South Carolina to settle there as well. Burrington ignored South Carolina's claim to land on the west bank of the Cape Fear River. Instead, he granted this land to settlers who left South Carolina to settle in North Carolina.

The settlers from South Carolina were fleeing economic depression, high taxes, and political unrest in their colony. Other settlers came from England, Scotland, and Ireland as well as the colonies of Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Some traveled on a new one-hundred-mile road between the Neuse River and the Cape Fear River.

Most settlers were attracted to this region by vast amounts of unclaimed land that were available and by commercial opportunities offered by the Cape Fear River. Since the Cape Fear River was the only deep river in the Coastal Plain that emptied into the ocean, large ships could travel it to the ports of Brunswick and Wilmington. As a result, settlers could send their goods to market and could trade with other colonies and with Europe more easily.

In the 1730s Welsh and Scotch-Irish began settling in the Cape Fear area. Around 1730 a group of Welsh settled along the Northeast Cape Fear River. In the mid-1730s Swiss from South Carolina and Scotch-Irish also settled in the area. The Scotch-Irish were fleeing high rents, heavy taxes, and famine in Ireland. The Swiss soon departed, but the Scotch-Irish remained on land along the Northeast Cape Fear River. Lowland Scots, often merchants, also came to North Carolina. While some went north to the Albemarle, many went to Wilmington to improve their fortunes.

Highland Scots immigrated to North Carolina as well. The first group arrived in 1739. Many more came in the following years, especially in the 1760s and 1770s. Some of the Highland Scots may have been political refugees fleeing Scotland after a failed uprising against the English. Most wished to escape the high rents, unemployment, and poverty in their country.

**Settlement of the Coastal Plain 1650-1775**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Why settle in the Coastal Plain?** | **Who settled in the Coastal Plain?** | **Challenges** | **Economy** | **Leaders** |
|  ***The Albemarle***  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| ***The Middle Coastal Plain*** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Cape Fear*** |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Settlement of the Piedmont, 1730-1775**

North Carolina settlers from Europe or of European descent remained mostly in the Coastal Plain Region until about forty years before the American Revolution (1775– 1783). **The fall line**, with its waterfalls and rapids, made traveling on rivers difficult and discouraged migration into the Piedmont from the Coastal Plain. But once settlers began arriving in the Piedmont, they came in great numbers and helped make North Carolina's population grow rapidly. The colony's population more than doubled in the decade from 1765 to 1775.

The Piedmont stretches from the fall line westward to the edge of the Appalachian Mountains. This colonial backcountry differed from the low-lying Coastal Plain. Its limestone and clay soils supported forests and grasslands. Its swift-flowing, shallow streams and narrow rivers were not good for boat traffic, but they offered excellent sites for **mills** and **farms**.

Though few roads ventured into the backcountry, two were vital to settlement of the region. The **Great Indian Trading Path** began in Petersburg, Virginia, and traveled southwest through the Piedmont to present-day Mecklenburg County. It had been used for centuries by Native Americans, and in the mid-1700s settlers began using it to travel into North Carolina. The second major road used by settlers was the **Great Wagon Road**, which stretched from Pennsylvania through Virginia's Shenandoah Valley and into North Carolina.

Initially the push for European settlement of the Piedmont came from English colonists living in the east. But Piedmont rivers: such as the Broad, Catawba, and Yadkin/ Pee Dee flowed south into South Carolina. That made communication and trade with the eastern part of the colony difficult and discouraged settlers from the Coastal Plain.

For this reason, only a few came inland from coastal towns, and by the 1730s Piedmont North Carolina was just starting to grow. Early Piedmont settlers were primarily Scotch- Irish and German people who were descendants of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia settlers. These settlers came down the Great Wagon Road. Many left their home colonies because suitable land in those colonies had become scarce and expensive.

\*Where did most of the Piedmont’s settlers come from? How did they get there? Why was it difficult to travel to the Piedmont from the Coastal Plain?

The **Scotch-Irish**, or Ulster Scots, were descendants of Scots who had moved to Northern Ireland. They had prospered in Ireland until changes in English policies led many to migrate to America, where most settled in Pennsylvania. They began to arrive in North Carolina in the 1730s, leaving Pennsylvania after crops were harvested in the fall and arriving in the Piedmont in time to plant winter crops and seedlings that they brought with them.

On small farms these Scotch-Irish settlers grew corn for home use and wheat and tobacco for use and for export. They raised livestock and drove them in large numbers to northern markets. Settlers built stores, gristmills, sawmills, and tanneries. Blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers, potters, rope makers, wagon makers, and wheelwrights established many local industries. Brewers, distillers, weavers, hatters, tailors, and others practiced their trades either in isolated homes or in shops in towns.

**Germans of Lutheran faiths** came to Pennsylvania and then to the Piedmont for many of the same reasons as the Scotch-Irish. Most of the Lutherans settled in the area drained by the Catawba and Yadkin Rivers. Some joined members of German Reformed congregations in settling all across the backcountry.

**Moravians**, also from Germany and then Pennsylvania, arrived in present-day Forsyth County in 1753. They began building a well-planned, tightly controlled congregational community. Land was held in common, and crafts, occupations, and even marriages required approval from community boards. Salem and its outlying settlements prospered and provided neighbors with mills, tanyards, shops, crafts, medical care, fine music, and other economic and cultural amenities.

\*Why did the Scotch-Irish, German Lutherans, and Moravians move to the Piedmont? What did they do when they got there?

Many of the German settlers clustered together and preserved their native language in homes, churches, and schools. German publishers prospered in Salisbury and in Salem. Gradually many of the settlers adopted English-sounding names and switched to speaking the English language.

With very different cultures and religious beliefs, the Scotch-Irish and German groups established neighboring settlements and towns but had little contact with each other. They came in such numbers that **six new counties** were created in the Piedmont between 1746 and 1763.

As the population of the Piedmont grew, so did its towns. While the majority of backcountry immigrants settled on farms, others settled in and established towns. Many towns were established along the two main roads in the region. The Moravian villages of Bethabara (1753), Bethania (1756), and Salem (1766) were not far from the Great Wagon Road. Hillsborough (1754) and Charlotte (1766) were established on the Great Indian Trading Path. Salisbury was established in 1753 where the two roads crossed.

\*Why were towns established close to the main roads?

Most of these towns had stores, taverns, craft shops, churches, and schools. Salisbury, Hillsborough, and Charlotte were places for county courts to meet. On court days, people came into towns to trade, buy supplies, and socialize with friends.

Also in towns, as well as at large farms and crossroads stores, farm and craft products were gathered together for shipping to the coast. Once there, they were traded for goods and supplies that backcountry settlers could not produce for themselves. In a similar manner, flocks or herds of livestock were gathered to be driven to distant markets.

\*How are the historic towns of the Piedmont similar to the towns we live in today? How are they different?

Because of the geography of the Piedmont, much of this trade flowed outside the colony. Few roads connected the Piedmont with the Coastal Plain. Around Hillsborough, for example, many settlers sent goods up the Great Indian Trading Path into Virginia instead of to North Carolina ports such as Edenton. People living in the northwest Piedmont still found it easier to send goods north along the Great Wagon Road. Other goods from the Piedmont traveled on rivers that flowed into South Carolina.

Colonial and county officials were concerned about the destinations of goods from the Piedmont. They built or improved roads to courthouse towns, mills, and stores to make trade with the east easier. Their efforts proved successful, and by 1760 Piedmont settlers were sending goods overland toward the coast. A 1773 pamphlet reported that "40 or 50" wagons filled with "beef, pork, and flower [flour] in barrels, also their livestock, Indian corn, raw hydes, butter, tallow, and whatever they have for market" were arriving daily in the small town of Cross Creek (present-day Fayetteville). These and other products, including wheat, deerskins, tobacco, naval stores, and flaxseed, were then loaded onto rafts and floated down the Cape Fear River to Wilmington.

\*Why do you think officials were concerned about where the goods from the Piedmont were going? What did they do about it? How did this change our state?

**Settlement of the Piedmont 1730-1775**

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| --- | --- |
|  | **Scotch-Irish, German Lutherans,  German Moravians** |
| What brought them to the Piedmont? |  |
| Farming |  |
| Contributions to the Piedmont |  |
| Trades |  |

**Settlement of the Mountains, 1775-1838 – (Annotated Teacher Copy)**

**Economic Political Cultural**

European Migration

The most prominent Native Americans to settle in the mountains of western present-day North Carolina were the **Cherokee Indians.** Their first known contact with Europeans occurred in 1540, when Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and his men came to the mountains in search of gold. Following this brief encounter, the Cherokee and Europeans had limited contact until the late 1600s. A thriving trade developed between the Cherokee and White settlers in the early 1700s.

As more Whites immigrated into the area just west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the late 1700s, the Cherokee who were living there moved west. As a result, White migration into present-day Buncombe, Henderson, and Transylvania Counties grew rapidly for a while.

The new settlers in the Mountains found it difficult to travel the steep, rough, and muddy roads back and forth to their county seats in Rutherford, Burke, and Wilkes Counties. They had to go to these **county seats** to pay taxes, buy or sell land, go to court, or carry on other business. The settlers began to ask the legislature to establish new counties so they would not have to travel so far to county seats. In response, the legislature established Buncombe and Ashe Counties in 1792 and 1799 respectively. Morristown, or Moriston (present-day **Asheville**), was founded as the county seat of Buncombe County because it was centrally located at a major crossroad. Jefferson was named the county seat in Ashe County.

The settlers who came to the Mountains were primarily of **English, Scotch-Irish, and German** descent. They came to buy, settle, and farm the cheap, fertile bottomlands and hillsides in the region.

Some migrated from the North Carolina Piedmont and the Coastal Plain. They came by foot, wagon, or horseback, entering the area through gaps such as Swannanoa, Hickory Nut, Gillespie, and Deep Gaps.

Other English, Scotch-Irish, and German settlers came from Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. They traveled down the Great Wagon Road to the Piedmont Region of North Carolina and then **traveled west** to reach the mountains.

The Buncombe Turnpike and Gold!

Problems with travel and trade changed with the completion of the **Buncombe Turnpike** in 1827. The turnpike followed the French Broad River north of Asheville to reach Greeneville, Tennessee. South of Asheville, the turnpike continued to Greenville, South Carolina. The turnpike was a better road than previous roads in the Mountain Region, which usually had been steep, narrow paths. It connected the North Carolina Mountain Region with other, larger markets.

Drovers were now able to drive surplus hogs, geese, or turkeys to **markets** outside the Mountain Region. Farmers could now use their wagons to transport crops to market. **Tourists** could now reach the mountains more easily. They could come in wagons, carriages, or stagecoaches, rather than on foot or horseback. Asheville and Warm Springs (now Hot Springs) became popular tourist destinations. Flat Rock attracted many summer residents from the Low Country of South Carolina, including Charleston.

The discovery of **gold** in western North Carolina brought an economic boom to the region in the 1820s and 1830s. Burke and Rutherford Counties experienced a gold rush in the mid-1820s when hundreds of miners arrived looking for gold. During this time, North Carolina became the leading gold-producing state. However, with the discovery of gold in California in the late 1840s, most of the miners left for California.

Development and Conflict

During the first three decades of the 1800s, economic and political conditions were poor. A steady stream of emigrating North Carolinians passed through the Mountain Region headed for points west.

North Carolina political conditions were affected by sectionalism, or conflict between the eastern and western sections of the state. At the time, each county, regardless of population, elected one representative to the state senate and two representatives to the North Carolina House of Commons. The east had more counties and, as a result, more representatives who could outvote representatives from the west.

By 1830 the western part of the state had more people, but the east continued to control the government. Calls for a constitutional convention were defeated repeatedly until 1834 when western counties threatened to **revolt and secede** from the state if a convention was not called.

Fortunately, a convention was called in 1835. The convention reformed the state constitution and created a more democratic government. The east would continue to control the senate, whose members were now elected from districts. These districts were created according to the amount of **tax** paid to the state. Because the east was wealthier and paid more taxes, it had more districts. But the west would control the population-based house because it had more people. Since neither the east nor the west could now control the entire government, the two sections were forced to cooperate. These changes benefited the western part of the state.

It was also during this period, in 1838, that the federal government forced a majority of the Cherokee in the region to move to present-day Oklahoma. Thousands of Cherokee died in the journey west. Although a remnant of the Cherokee were able to stay behind, Whites soon began to settle on the Cherokee land, which was fertile and cheap.

By the 1830s, transportation in the Mountains had improved and conflict between the east and west had decreased. But the Mountain Region remained relatively isolated for another fifty years until **railroad lines** reached the area.

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**African American Settlement**

**Coastal Plain** (From Settlement of the Coastal Plain, 1650-1775 by Alan D. Watson

African Americans, most of whom were slaves, greatly added to the population of the colony. By the time North Carolina was settled, slavery had developed in Virginia and South Carolina. White Virginians and South Carolinians who immigrated to North Carolina often brought slaves with them. Slaves were also brought from abroad.

Available records of slaves imported from 1749 to 1775 show that 68.6 percent came from the West Indies and 15.6 percent from Africa. 11.6 percent of slaves imported during this time came from other mainland colonies. The origin of the remaining 4.2 percent is unknown.

Most slaves lived in the lower Cape Fear area, where early immigrants from South Carolina brought the plantation culture with them. Though most settlers lived on small farms, some settlers owned large tracts of land and large numbers of slaves. These plantations produced most of the colony's rice, indigo, and exportable naval stores. The fertile land in this area and the closeness of the Cape Fear River made trade with other colonies and with Europe profitable. These factors encouraged the plantation culture here.

Slaves were not as common in the Albemarle and middle Coastal Plain for a number of reasons. First, just as the Dismal Swamp and poor roads made travel and immigration by land difficult, they also made importing slaves by land difficult. Also, the dangerous Outer Banks and the absence of a deep water port discouraged importing them by sea.

Second, getting goods to market was difficult. The rivers in these areas emptied into sounds, not the ocean, and ports along the rivers were located far inland. This meant that boats required more time to reach port, to pick up or deliver cargo, and to return to the ocean. Because getting goods to market was so difficult, most settlers could not make money by raising crops for export and did not need slaves. Though some did grow wheat and tobacco for export, many lived as subsistence farmers.

**Piedmont** (From Settlement of the Piedmont, 1730-1775 by Christopher E. Hendricks and J. Edwin Hendricks)

Americans of African descent came to the Piedmont in small numbers during the colonial period, usually accompanying their masters from other areas. Many groups who had not previously owned slaves acquired slaves as their wealth increased and as neighboring slaveholders made the practice appear more acceptable. Rarely did colonial slaveholders in the Piedmont own more than a dozen slaves. In 1775, only fifteen thousand of the fewer than seventy thousand slaves in North Carolina lived west of the Coastal Plain. Most of the settlers in the Piedmont were small farmers and did not own slaves.

**Mountains** (From "North Carolina's Final Frontier" by Ron Holland)

A small number of African American slaves were brought into the Mountain Region to work some of the larger farms. Robert Love of Haywood County, for example, owned one hundred slaves. But his case was an exception. Most farms were small and self-sufficient. Largely because traveling and getting crops to market were difficult and expensive on the rough, muddy roads, most farmers did not grow excess crops for trade and did not need slaves.

**Settlement of African Americans in North Carolina**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Coastal Region** | **Piedmont Region** | **Mountain Region** |
|  |  |  |