THE BEGINNING

Although earlier European settlements on today’s South Carolina coast had failed, Stephen Bull wrote on September 12, 1670, to his patron in England, Lord Ashley, “Wee conceive this to be as healthful a place as ever was settled . . . there is a lande sufficient here for some thousands of People where they may make very brave and happy settlements.”

The Kiawah Indian chief Cacique had directed the settlers to Albemarle Point on the Ashley River, the site of today’s major state historical park known as Charles Towne Landing. In exchange for guns to protect themselves from the rival Westos from across the Savannah River, the Kiawah befriended the English, providing them supplies and other help. This site provided the launch for the state’s first permanent European settlers. It turned out to be less healthy and less safe than first believed, and in 1680 the settlers moved across the Ashley to today’s Charleston peninsula, building a palisade wall around the settlement for protection—the only English walled city in what would become the United States.

More than a century and a half earlier, other Europeans—from Spain—had landed on the South Carolina coast, confronting native peoples who called their land Chicora. Those earliest Europeans left behind a record of treachery, mistreatment, and devastating new diseases. In 1521, after a Spanish expedition from the Caribbean anchored on the coast near present-day Beaufort, crew members enticed friendly Indians aboard, held them captive, and sailed back to the Caribbean. There they sold the captives as slaves.

One of these ships, however, wrecked at sea. Its survivors included a captive who learned Spanish, became a Christian, and two years later traveled to Spain. Given the name Francisco Chicora, he spent time with and influenced the royal family. His stories, some of which got into print, led to Charles V’s
approving an exploration and a settlement north of present-day Florida. This time the Spanish brought African slaves with them.

In 1526 Chicora served as interpreter and guide for the first Spanish settlement, San Miguel de Gualdape, probably near present-day Georgetown, South Carolina. Once back among his native people, Chicora quickly abandoned the Spaniards. Their settlement became the first European colony anywhere in what today is the United States. It survived less than a year. In the earliest of many slave revolts in what would become South Carolina, Indians and Africans rose up against the Spanish. Only a starving one-fourth of the original six hundred settlers made it back to Spain.

In 1540 Hernando de Soto led an expedition across the South that crossed through South Carolina. At a major Indian settlement near present-day Camden, an Indian headwoman welcomed the Europeans as if they were visiting dignitaries. De Soto responded by taking her hostage, together with her female court, when he moved northward into North Carolina.

In 1562 France settled a short-lived colony on Port Royal Sound, a name given by the French leader Jean Ribaut, at the site of what would someday

Spanish settlement map. In 1577 Spain placed a settlement on Santa Elena Island near Beaufort. This settlement had a baroque church, a fort, and about sixty houses. Ten years later it would be abandoned. The place name survives today as St. Helena Island. History of South Carolina Slide Collection, B-06
become Parris Island Marine Recruit Depot. After the French colony failed, the Spaniards returned. By 1570 they had established a model Spanish town with more than three hundred people, including women and children. This colony suffered, however, from an absence of effective leadership. When food became scarce, the colony’s raids on Indian settlements ultimately led to open warfare. In 1587, after Sir Francis Drake’s English explorations along the South Atlantic coasts and his assault on St. Augustine, Spain abandoned its settlements north of Florida.

Although the remaining native population on the South Carolina coast seemed to regain their lands after the first European assault, the Spanish legacy included new diseases, such as typhus fever, that wiped out much of the native population. Native Carolinians had managed, nevertheless, to repel the Europeans seeking land, labor, and mastery. They would not return for almost a century.

The English political philosopher John Locke helped draft the original Fundamental Constitutions for Carolina before the settlement in 1670 that established Charleston. The provision for religious liberty exceeded anything existing in seventeenth-century Europe. Another provision provided specifically for chattel slavery. Although none of the five drafts were ever adopted, many of the basic principles became fully accepted and influenced the earliest development of the colony. Only Roman Catholics were excluded from the free practice of their religion, a reflection of the politics of Restoration England. A provision that settlers believe in God covered Jews as well as Christians. Capitalist-minded Quakers and Huguenots were welcomed in a colony looking for settlers and economic development.

Three black slaves landed with the first fleet of Englishmen, thus introducing into the permanent settlement the issue that would dominate much of the economic, social, and political life of South Carolina’s next three hundred years.

South Carolina developed as the only English colony in North America where slavery had been entrenched from the very beginning. Although the earlier colonists of Virginia had first experimented with slavery early in the seventeenth century, it was the hard- and high-living English planters on the Caribbean island of Barbados who perfected the oppressive system of chattel slavery in the 1630s. Their system became the model for the Carolina settlement, and sons of Barbadian planter families—seeking new lands and new staple crops—became a significant part of the original Charles Town settlement.

Locke had written his document of governance for his patron, Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury, who emerged as the leader of
the colonization effort as one of eight entrepreneurial English aristocrats. Known as the Lords Proprietors, all had loyally supported Charles II in his days of war and exile. As a reward after the Restoration, Charles gave them a grant of land that would be named “Carolina” after “Carolus,” the Latin version of his name.

These eight noblemen included some of England’s most daring men. Many of their names remain familiar today. Present-day South Carolina counties are named for Sir John Colleton, Lord Berkeley, and the Earl of Clarendon. The Berkeley County seat of Monck’s Corner apparently was named for General George Monck, Duke of Albemarle. Traditional Charlestonians still say, with mock solemnity, that Charleston is located where the Ashley and Cooper rivers meet to form the Atlantic Ocean.

The grant of Carolina included all the land between Virginia and a point in Florida sixty-five miles south of St. Augustine and extending to the Pacific Ocean. Captain William Hilton sailed from Barbados in 1663 to find a location for a settlement by wealthy Barbadians. Although his voyage produced no settlement, publication of his glowing account helped the proprietors in securing settlers. Hilton Head Island, today an upscale subtropical resort and retirement center, was named for him.

Most of the Lords Proprietors already had strong Caribbean connections. Ashley Cooper, in addition to a Caribbean plantation, also held a financial interest in the Royal Africa Company, the major English financial concern involved in the transatlantic slave trade. Moreover some of South Carolina’s most prominent families, including the Draytons and the Middletons, can trace their lineage directly to Barbadian settlers. The first Africans in the colony had been slaves in Barbados. Some historians refer to South Carolina as “the colony of a colony” because of the strong Barbadian influence.2 Barbadian architectural influence is also found in Charleston, especially the single houses—a single room wide with their downstairs and upstairs piazzas, or porches, to catch the breezes.

Present-day South Carolina roughly resembles an equilateral triangle, with roughly a 200-mile base resting upon the Atlantic Ocean and the apex 236 miles to the northwest on the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains. South Carolina acquired most of its mountain strip in 1772 when North Carolina made an equitable settlement of an earlier boundary error to the east that was caused by faulty surveying.

The state that grew from these colonial beginnings divides geologically and geographically into two regions. This division is marked by a fall line,
a sandy belt that runs from Augusta northeastward through Columbia to the North Carolina line near Cheraw. In the early days of settlement the fall line marked the point where streams became navigable, and it marked a rough political and cultural boundary between lowcountry and upcountry. In the centuries to come these two sections would vie for control in state politics and, just as frequently, unite against outside threats to a common way of life.

In granting official toleration to all groups that “solemnly worship God,” Locke’s original Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina opened the colony to settlers who practiced a tradition that dissented from the Anglican form of worship. England fought wars with Spain and France, two of the great Catholic powers of Europe, almost once a generation in the early modern period. Englishmen worried throughout the seventeenth century about Romish plots against their liberties at home. After the Restoration most Englishmen equated the practice of Catholicism with political treason. South Carolina would not have an active openly Catholic congregation until after the American Revolution, with the founding of St. Mary of the Annunciation in Charleston in 1789.

Most of the first English settlers in Carolina were members of the Church of England. One of the first churches built in the new colony was St. Philip’s, built on the Charleston peninsula in 1680 on the present site of St. Michael’s. In 1707 the Anglican Church became the established church in Carolina.
Clergy received stipends funded by the colonial government, and church parishes functioned as voting districts. Although the Anglican Church would be disestablished in South Carolina during the American Revolution, its Episcopal form, developed after adoption of the Constitution, would continue to have a profound cultural influence in the South Carolina lowcountry.

Most white settlers unaffiliated with the Church of England adhered to some variant of the Reformed tradition. French Huguenots seeking religious freedom were among the early settlers of the colony. A group of Puritans from Dorchester, Massachusetts, founded a Congregational church in 1696 in today’s Dorchester County, leaving behind the county name before moving to Georgia. “The White Meeting House” on today’s Meeting Street had been established in 1681 in Charleston as the primary congregation for those of Calvinist and Congregationalist persuasion. Theological disagreements led to splits in this congregation and the founding of First Scots Presbyterian and Charleston’s Unitarian congregation, the first of its kind in the American South. The original church is today’s Circular Church, a vibrant and politically progressive congregation at the original Meeting Street site in downtown Charleston.

By 1700 Charleston’s first Baptists had organized a congregation. Like most English Baptists of the time, this congregation followed closely the teachings of John Calvin on election and predestination. Influenced by American revivalism in the early nineteenth century, the Southern Baptist tradition departed from its Reformation roots. Today the First Baptist Church of Charleston calls itself “the mother church of the Southern Baptist Convention.”

Dissenters who made up the so-called left wing of the Reformation also came to Carolina. Quakers, persecuted throughout much of the British Atlantic world, made Carolina home in the late seventeenth century. By the middle of the eighteenth, a large Quaker community lived in what is today Newberry County, and a small but prominent group settled in Charleston. Most Quakers, largely because of their opposition to slavery, left South Carolina by 1808, but the original members of two prominent South Carolina families, the Ladsons and the Elliotts, were Quaker.

Jews arrived in the colony before 1700. Francis Salvador, a member of the Provincial Congress of South Carolina in 1775, became the first Jew ever to hold public office in the Western Hemisphere. Although the Jewish population in the state remains less than half of 1 percent, Charleston was home to the largest Jewish population of any American city as late as 1820. Participation by Jews in public affairs would continue in the tradition set by Salvador. Columbia, the state capital, elected two Jewish intendants (mayors) before the Civil War.
only a tiny remnant exists of the original Indian settlers. The Catawba, who possess a reservation in York County, have tribal status now recognized by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 2005 the descendants of both the Pee Dee and Waccamaw Indians received official recognition from the state of South Carolina. A small group of Kusso-Natchez (Edisto) remain in Dorchester County, and some Santee descendants lived near the town of Santee. The names of many original Indian tribes remain preserved in South Carolina. Rivers include the Catawba, Pee Dee, Wando, Congaree, Saluda, Santee, Waccamaw, Combahee, Edisto, Keowee, and the wild Chattooga that links South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. Cherokee County was once part of the lower Cherokee nation. Oconee County is named for a mountain in the Cherokee nation. Kiawah Island near Charleston is named after the tribe whose leader welcomed the first English settlers.

The first known rice grown in South Carolina was on the Charleston peninsula in the 1690s. It was initially an experimental crop grown by a few entrepreneurs, but by the 1720s thousands of West Africans familiar with the crop had been brought to the colony to provide both the skills and hard labor necessary to build dikes and convert tens of thousands of acres of tidal
marshes into rice fields. During that time rice replaced the deerskin trade and other early economic experiments as the primary product for export.

Slave labor quickly became the economic engine driving the colony. By 1708 enslaved Africans outnumbered whites. Chattel slavery shaped everything from law to land ownership. The earliest colonial land policy insured both the marginality of the small farmer and the centrality of plantation slavery.

In the first fifty years of colonial existence, the fierce independence of the Barbadian settlers caused the financial hopes of the Lords Proprietors to dim. White settlers, many with an aristocratic temperament linked to a strong entrepreneurial impulse, quickly gained control of the profitable deerskin trade. By 1719 the Lords Proprietors had lost control of the colonial governorship, and a decade later South Carolina became a royal colony, with the king appointing the governor.

Land ownership became more common after King George II authorized colonial governor Robert Johnson in 1730 to grant fifty acres to white men for every dependent man, woman, and child—white or black, slave or free. From 1731 to 1738 more than a million acres were added to the tax books by feverish land speculation, with planters importing 15,600 slaves. Between 1720 and 1740 a total of 40,000 enslaved Africans came into the colony.

Meanwhile the colony had survived such major crises as a war with the Yamasee Indians and a showdown with pirates. The Yamasee War of 1715 had almost wiped out the English settlement. White settlers survived only with the help of their Cherokee allies to the north. Piracy became a serious problem with the end of Queen Anne’s War in 1713 and the sudden unemployment of hundred of “sea dogs.” The hanging of forty-nine pirates in Charleston in 1718 is recorded on a stone marker at White Point Gardens near the Battery in Charleston. The marker tells of the hanging of Stede Bonnet—the so-called Gentleman Pirate who had once been a respectable sugar planter in the Caribbean—and his crew.

The refusal of Africans to submit meekly to the slave system had represented the major challenge for the first generations of South Carolina whites. Escape to the frontier or into Spanish-controlled Florida became a common occurrence in the early eighteenth century. Spanish authorities encouraged this practice as a way to strike back at the hated English. In 1733 Governor Antonio de Benavides of Florida declared that slaves who adopted the Catholic faith and worked in St. Augustine for four years would become free. Before 1740 the Spanish had a settlement and a fort north of St. Augustine made up of armed African militia, almost all of them former slaves from South Carolina.
In September 1739 resistance reached its apex with the Stono Rebellion. A group of about twenty African slaves seized weapons near the western branch of the Stono River south of Charleston and began a march they hoped would take them to the safety of Florida. As their numbers grew, the Africans made no attempt to hide themselves. Martial tunes played on captured fife and drums joined with shouts of “Liberty!”

Leaving a swath of destruction and violence in their wake, the Africans burned and plundered plantations, taverns, and shops. Whites were killed with little regard for age or gender, but at least two were spared because of their reputation for kindness to slaves.

In a dramatic moment the carriage of Lieutenant Governor William Bull crossed paths with the insurrectionists. Bull ordered his driver to get him back to Charleston posthaste, where he called out all available white militia. The white militia and the rebels fought a pitched battle near Jacksonborough, between Charleston and Beaufort. The better-armed and better-trained militia defeated and captured many of the slaves. Roughly forty whites and sixty blacks died in the melee. Others escaped in groups into the woods, where they continued to harass outlying white settlements for many months.

White response to the rebellion proved swift and brutal. Travelers on the Old Post Road between Charleston and Beaufort (U.S. Highway 17 essentially follows this route today) would have seen the heads of the rebels placed on pikes up and down the route.
Many scholars view the Stono Rebellion as a significant turning point in South Carolina’s history. The “Negro Act” of 1740 significantly narrowed the lives of African slaves while encouraging white planters to follow a policy that combined paternalism and repression. This method of control characterized white supremacy in South Carolina into the mid-twentieth century.

Stono increased white fears of the black majority. The state legislature levied a duty on slave imports that briefly slowed down the African trade. In order to attract more white immigrants, Governor Nathaniel Johnson had already proposed a plan for nine townships that would bring structure and organization to South Carolina’s frontier.

In the 1730s and 1740s about eight thousand Germans, mostly German-Swiss, settled into the present Lexington, Calhoun, Orangeburg, and Newberry counties, bringing with them the Lutheran Church. From the descendants of these settlers emerged today’s Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, the denomination’s only seminary in the South. Another group of Germans settled in Charleston. In 1759 they founded St. John’s Lutheran Church, still an active congregation on Archdale Street. In the decade before the Revolutionary War, these Germans established a vibrant community of artisans and merchants. German Palatines from upper Bavaria and parts of southwestern Germany came in the 1760s, many as indentured servants who were forced to settle along the Savannah River just above Augusta, Georgia, as a line of defense against the hostile Indian frontier.

About 1840 a large colony of Welsh Baptists from Pennsylvania were granted a tract of a thousand square miles on the Pee Dee River. Their descendants, whose names include Lewis, Rowland, Wilds, Evans, Ellerbe, Griffith, Gillespie, Greenwood, Jones, Pawley, and James, spread throughout South Carolina. Although a group of Scots-Irish colonists settled in the Williamsburg Township in 1736, the major Scots-Irish movement in South Carolina began fifteen years later. These settlers, originally attracted to William Penn’s colony, had pushed south in the search for surplus land. Their path from Pennsylvania went through the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in the 1730s, into North Carolina the next decade, and then in the 1750s into the present South Carolina counties of Lancaster, York, Chester, and Chesterfield—all named after communities in Pennsylvania. By 1775 an estimated forty thousand Scots-Irish had settled throughout the South Carolina upcountry, bringing the Presbyterian Church with them. The Scots-Irish were actually Scotsmen, whom the British government around 1600 had begun moving into Ulster in northern Ireland. The rebellious
Irish were never subdued, and the Ulster Scots by 1700 had begun to experience economic hardship as well as political and religious difficulties. They had never intermarried with the Roman Catholic Irish, who bitterly resented their presence. In South Carolina a Scots-Irishman was described as one who came to keep the Ten Commandments and everything else he could get his hands on. They also were known for family feuds and a fondness of whiskey and as significant contributors to the South’s general bellicosity.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Piedmont had become primarily an area of small farmers, whose chief products were cattle and grain. Fiercely independent Calvinists, their devotion to duty and dedication to entrepreneurialism as a moral obligation made them ideal frontiersmen. Their entrepreneurial habits would soon make them ideal slaveholders. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Scots-Irish love of profit and the development of the cotton gin had helped transform the Piedmont into a plantation region.

Other Scottish settled in Charleston. In addition to names introduced by Mc and Mac, others range from Caldwell, Calhoun, Reed, and Logan to Deas, Buchanan, Gleaton, and Pringle.

The heavy migration of Scots-Irish resulted in a white majority in the 1770s in South Carolina that lasted until the 1820 census. A third of the European colonists were Scots-Irish or Scottish, the highest percentage of any colony. Although English settlers dominated the lowcountry, their 37 percent of the white population was smaller than that of any colony except Pennsylvania. Another 12 percent of the state’s European immigrants were Irish, and 9 percent were Welsh—a total of 90 percent from today’s Great Britain. The remaining European colonists were German, French, Swedish, and Dutch. No other colony received as high a percentage of French immigrants, overwhelmingly Huguenot Protestants seeking religious freedom. Many of their descendants achieved prosperity, influence, and social standing.

The enormous expansion of the white population in South Carolina’s backcountry led to conflict with the Cherokee Indians, one of the largest Indian tribes in the colonial Southeast. The expansion of white settlements into Cherokee lands soured their relationship with the English, as did their indebtedness to the wily white Indian traders who crisscrossed the region. Local folklore in the upstate still reflects the anxiety of those times.

At Issaqueena Falls in northern Oconee County, one can still hear the sad tale of the legendary Indian maiden who threw herself from the falls after an unhappy love affair with one of these traders. An official current version inscribed on a state marker there, however, instead tells of Issaqueena hiding
on a ledge just below the overhang of today’s Issaqueena Falls as the Cherokee raiders searched for her, then riding a horse to Fort Ninety-Six to warn David Allen, a silversmith, of the impending Cherokee raid. They later married and by one account moved to Alabama, where they happily lived for many years.

A few hundred yards away from those falls is the Stumphouse Mountain railroad tunnel, the remains of a nine-year project to link Charleston to the Midwest by railroad. The tunnel was scheduled for completion in 1861, but the Civil War intervened. The 25-foot high, 17-foot wide, and 1,600-foot long tunnel through solid granite was abandoned after the war. Roughly a hundred yards off Highway 28 north of Walhalla, visitors receive a spectacular view of the falls and beyond.

Dissatisfaction erupted into open warfare in 1754 after Britain and France began the Seven Years’ War, also known as the War for Empire. In North America the conflict became known as the French and Indian War. The Cherokees had initially allied with British forces, but they withdrew from that alliance after British soldiers in Virginia executed braves for alleged desertion. In response Cherokee war bands raided white settlements all along the southeastern frontier, including South Carolina.
Between 1759 and 1762 South Carolina mounted three separate expeditions against the Cherokee. In the summer of 1761 Lieutenant Colonel James Grant of the British regular army commanded a destructive campaign that drove the Cherokee into the upper northwestern tip of what is now South Carolina.

But jealousy exposed conflict between colonial South Carolina and British authority. Thomas Middleton came close to meeting Colonel Grant in a duel over what Henry Laurens later called “a serious quarrel on a very silly subject.” Grant had supposedly been too easy on the Indian enemies and allegedly slighted the fighting abilities of local troops in comparison to British regulars.

Christopher Gadsden of Charleston, a successful merchant who owned one of the largest wharves on the Charleston peninsula, become embroiled in this controversy and helped to publicize it. His political views and fiery temperament made him a thorn in the side of the British colonial government. In 1762, after Gadsden was elected to the Colonial Assembly, the royal governor of South Carolina refused to allow him to take his seat, supposedly because of a technical violation in election procedure. In truth Governor Thomas Boone was carrying out a new British mandate of the 1760s: assert royal authority over the North American colonies and remind them of their ultimate obedience to the Crown. Gadsden presented a tantalizing target.

British efforts to strengthen control over their colonies produced furor in New England and Virginia. The economic depression made the combination of taxation and mercantilism favoring British firms especially burdensome. In South Carolina, however, rice planters on the coast benefited from British rule. Meanwhile white settlers in the backcountry, rather than being angry at British laws that barely affected them, felt outrage at the colonial legislature in Charleston and its unresponsiveness to upcountry issues, such as the lack of courts. To rustic backcountry farmers, King George seemed less of a tyrant than the wealthy rice planters and Charleston merchants who dominated the assembly.

Christopher Gadsden led a delegation to the Stamp Tax Congress in New York in 1765. After returning home, he addressed a crowd that gathered under a large oak, known afterward as the Liberty Tree. It became the site of many future meetings, where Gadsden organized the small craftsmen who as the Sons of Liberty became the core of support for the cause of independence.

The plantation and mercantile elites came slowly to support if not independence, at least some adjustment of relations with Britain. Henry Laurens, a descendant of Huguenot settlers, became disenchanted with British policy after 1767. He had made a fortune in the slave trade and other shipping ventures, but British customs officials that year seized some of his ships, offending one of England’s closest friends in South Carolina. Laurens later
served as the president of the Continental Congress and became the only American ever imprisoned in the Tower of London.

Why did elites, seemingly so conservative in instinct and practice, move in the direction of independence? One explanation is that many saw it as an issue of honor, that what they perceived as their rights as Englishmen were being violated. The historian Robert Olwell, in his book *Masters, Slaves and Subjects*, suggests that the fears of these elite whites were aroused by rampant rumors that the British intended to ignite a slave rebellion in South Carolina.4

Lord William Campbell, the colony’s last royal governor, wrote in the summer of 1775 that white South Carolinians believed that “14,000 stands of arms were aboard the Scorpion, the sloop of war I came out in,” for the purpose of arming a slave rebellion. Although such stories were unsupported by evidence, Laurens wrote that all was “fear and zeal with delirium” that summer.5

Fear that the British intended to use every means available to suppress the colonies led white South Carolina to support the Declaration of Independence when it was proclaimed in July 1776. Four South Carolinians—Arthur Middleton, Edward Rutledge, Thomas Lynch Jr., and Thomas Heyward Jr.—signed it. Gadsden presented the declaration to South Carolina’s new Provincial Congress along with a copy of Tom Paine’s *Common Sense* and the banner, thereafter called the Gadsden Flag, with a coiled rattlesnake prepared to strike and emblazoned with the words “Don’t Tread on Me.”

During the 1670s and 1770s white South Carolinians had proudly shaped a set of social and cultural institutions. In their devotion to a premodern concept of liberty, they saw little irony in their equal devotion to chattel slavery. They rebelled against loss of their rights as Englishmen. For them liberty came to mean that native whites should rule the land. They threw off proprietary rule when it undercut their independence. In the 1760s many South Carolinians reacted assertively when the king and his ministers attempted to assert the Crown’s prerogative. In the two decades that followed they would fight a war for their concept of liberty and help forge a new American nation.