

JOHN LAWSON AND THE NATIVE PEOPLES OF CAROLINA

by
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On December 28, 1700, John Lawson set out from Charles Town on a 550-mile journey that would take him through the Carolina backcountry to English settlements on Pamlico River. During the intervening two months, he traveled without maps and with only a vague understanding of the terrain he was crossing. Led by native guides, Lawson witnessed firsthand a diverse native population whose fortunes already had been adversely determined by the European presence in North America.

A young, self-described adventurer, Lawson came to Charles Town on the advice of a "Gentleman" acquaintance in London who told him that, of the places he could travel to, "*Carolina* was the best Country I could go to; and, that there then lay a Ship in the *Thames*, in which I might have my Passage."¹ Lawson took this advice and, by early September, 1700, arrived in Charles Town by ship. Eventually, Lawson received an appointment by the Carolina Colony's Lords Proprietors to undertake a reconnaissance of the colony's interior. The purpose of this survey was to provide information that could be used to promote the eventual settlement of this region.

Lawson certainly was not the first Englishman to enter the backcountry. Virginia merchants had engaged in a lively trade with Carolina's Indians for nearly a half-century, and their agents had regularly traveled into the backcountry since the mid-1670s. Following the founding of Charles Town in 1670, Carolina merchants also quickly developed their own trade with the interior Indians, and by 1700 were firmly established as far as the towns on lower Catawba River. Despite this extensive history of Indian trade in the backcountry, geographical and cartographic knowledge was poor because most traders either were illiterate or had no interest in providing information to potential business rivals. In fact, by Lawson's time the competition between Carolina and Virginia for the Indian trade had become particularly fierce.

The significance of Lawson's account of his travels, published as *A New Voyage to Carolina* in 1709 and republished as *The History of North Carolina* in 1714, is that it was the first book to provide a detailed, clearly written description of the backcountry, including its fauna, flora, geology, topography, and people. As Hugh Lefler noted, it was "the only book to come out of proprietary North Carolina" and has endured as perhaps the best North American travel account of its era.² And, John Lawson wrote in an engaging, entertaining style that still captivates readers. As a testament to the book's importance and Lawson's skill as a writer, almost three centuries later *A New Voyage to Carolina* has been published more than a dozen times and is still in print.

Moreover, Lawson was the only person to write extensively from firsthand knowledge about the Indian peoples who occupied central North and South Carolina. The only previously published description of piedmont North Carolina was *The*

¹ Lefler 1967, p. 7.

² Lefler 1967, p. xv

Discoveries of John Lederer, translated from Latin into English by William Talbot and published in 1672. Lederer, a young German physician commissioned by Governor William Berkeley to explore lands west and southwest of Virginia in 1669 and 1670, met some of the same tribes visited three decades later by Lawson and may have traveled through some of the same country. However, his descriptions of native peoples and geography and his accompanying map lack precision, clarity, and occasional veracity, and thus would have had limited value for anyone wanting to traverse the backcountry.

Within 20 years of Lawson's journey, piedmont North Carolina lay largely abandoned, its native inhabitants having become victims of disease, rum, warfare, and slaving raids. Those who did survive sought refuge along the Virginia colonial frontier or among the towns of the Catawba Nation in upper South Carolina.

John Lawson's Journey

I now would like to retrace John Lawson's footsteps, revisiting the dozen or so Indian settlements he encountered along the way and describing in his own words the sometimes strange customs he observed. In reconstructing the South Carolina leg of the journey, I rely in part on Hugh Lefler's 1967 introduction to *A New Voyage to Carolina*. For his travels through North Carolina, I also rely on the writings of Douglas Rights.³ It is doubtful that we will ever know, with the precision we would like, the exact route followed by Lawson or the locations of all the villages he visited.

John Lawson began his exploration by boat. Upon leaving Charles Town harbor, his party of Englishmen and Indians traveled by large canoe northeastward along the inland marshes of the barrier islands to Santee River. After seven days, they reached the mouth of the Santee and began rowing upriver (Figure 1).

The following day they encountered a band of Sewee Indians who were engaged in hunting game using fire, a common practice among southeastern Indians. "When we approach'd nearer the Place, we found it to be some *Sewee Indians* firing the Cane Swamps, which drives out the Game, then taking their particular Stands, kill great Quantities of both Bear, Deer, Turkies, and what wild Creatures the Parts afford."⁴

Lawson noted that the Sewees had been greatly reduced by European-introduced diseases, a fate common to many of the native peoples he would encounter over the next two months.

These *Sewees* have been formerly a large Nation, though now very much decreas'd, since the *English* hath seated their Land, and all other Nations of *Indians* are observ'd to partake of the same Fate, where the *Europeans* come, the *Indians* being a People very apt to catch any Distemper they are afflicted withal; the Small-Pox has destroy'd many thousands of these Natives. . . .⁵

Lawson also took occasion here to comment on another malady of English origin—alcohol addiction—that afflicted the Sewees and others.

³ Rights 1931, 1947.

⁴ Lefler 1967, p. 17.

⁵ Lefler 1967, p. 17.

Rum, a Liquor now so much in Use with them, that they will part with the dearest Thing they have, to purchase it; and when they have got a little in their Heads, are the impatient Creatures living, 'till they have enough to make 'em quite drunk; and the most miserable Spectacles when they are so, some falling into the Fires, burn their Legs or Arms . . . and become Cripples all their Life-time; others from Precipices break their Bones and Joints, with abundance of Instances, yet none are so great to deter them from that accurs'd Practice of Drunkenness. . . .⁶

Later, while writing a general description of native peoples in North Carolina, Lawson made an equally telling remark about these two destructive forces, noting that:

The Small-Pox and Rum have made such a Destruction amongst them, that, on good grounds, I do believe, there is not the sixth Savage living within two hundred Miles of all our Settlements, as there were fifty Years ago. These poor Creatures have so many Enemies to destroy them, that it's a wonder one of them is alive near us.⁷

About 15 miles upriver from where they encountered the Sewee hunters, near present Jamestown, South Carolina, Lawson's party arrived at a small French Huguenot settlement comprised of about 70 families. Having settled here in the 1680s, Lawson found them to be both industrious and hospitable, and noted that they "follow a trade with the *Indians*, living very conveniently for that Interest."⁸

Because of difficulties in navigating the flood-swollen Santee River, they left their canoe and Indian guides behind the next morning and struck out on foot with a newly-hired Sewee guide, a "tall, lusty fellow" named Scipio. Still following the river valley, they made their way slowly past several French houses and plantations, needing a boat to cross each creek. After crossing the river by canoe they got lost in the flooded bottomland swamps but eventually they made their way to one of the French settlers' houses. From there they struck out toward a nearby Santee Indian camp and nearly froze to death by falling into a creek while crossing it.

The next morning they proceeded toward the Congarees without Scipio, who was still drunk from the night before. The Congarees were situated further upriver along Congaree River, near its confluence with the Wateree. Along the way they passed through Santee territory where they encountered Indian settlements as well as scattered, unoccupied houses. At one of these houses, they made themselves at home and took freely from the stores of food there. Afterward, they accidentally set the house on fire! The apparent indifference of Lawson and his fellow travelers to this event suggests that a subtle transformation in Indian-English relations already had taken place in the South Carolina lowcountry.⁹

⁶ Lefler 1967, p. 18.

⁷ Lefler 1967, p. 232.

⁸ Lefler 1967, p. 19

⁹ see Merrell 1989, p. 64.

When they arrived at a Santee village the next day, they were greeted by the town's inhabitants and Lawson observed firsthand the ravages of smallpox.

At these Cabins came to visit us the King of the *Santee* Nation. He brought with him their chief Doctor or Physician, who was warmly and neatly clad with a Match-Coat, made of Turkies Feathers, which makes a pretty Shew, seeming as if it was a Garment of the deepest silk Shag. This Doctor had the Misfortune to lose his Nose by the Pox, which Disease the *Indians* often get by the *English* Traders that use amongst them. . . .¹⁰

A few days later and further up Santee River, the surrounding terrain improved with swamps giving way to higher, well-drained land dominated by an oak-hickory forest. Here, Lawson and his fellow Englishmen came upon a large number of Santees who, like the Sewee hunters encountered earlier, were burning the woods to drive the game toward their hunters. They were well received by the hunters, who provided them with "barbaqu'd Turkeys, Bear's oil, and Venison." While among the Santee, Lawson learned of another hunting method in which the Indians used a disguise to stalk their prey.

[The disguises] . . . are made of the Head of a Buck, the back Part of the Horns being scrap and hollow, for Lightness of Carriage. The Skin is left to the setting on of the Shoulders, which is lin'd all around with small Hoops, and flat Sort of Laths, to hold it open for the Arm to go in. They have a Way to preserve the Eyes, as if living. The Hunter puts on a Match-coat made of Deer's Skin, with the Hair on, and a Piece of the white Part of the Deer's Skin that grows on the Breast, which is fasten'd to the Neck-End of this stalking Head, so hangs down. In these Habiliments an *Indian* will go as near a Deer as he pleases, the exact Motions and Behaviour of a Deer being so well counterfeited by 'em, that several Times it hath been known for two Hunters to come up with a stalking Head together, and unknown to each other, so that they have kill'd an *Indian* instead of a Deer, which hath happen'd sometimes to be a Brother, or some Dear Friend; for which Reason they allow not of that Sort of Practice, where the Nation is populous.¹¹

Before leaving the Santees Lawson hired another guide named Santee Jack, described as a good hunter and well-humored fellow, to take them to the Congarees. Their journey took a little more than three days and when they arrived at Congaree Town, they found it inhabited almost entirely by women and children, the men having gone off to hunt. Lawson described the town as being small, with not more than a dozen houses, and surrounded by other households scattered along the river. This appears to have been a typical pattern of settlement for much of the piedmont at the beginning of the 1700s.

While visiting the Congarees, Lawson again remarked about how European diseases had devastated the native population of Carolina.

¹⁰ Lefler 1967, p. 25.

¹¹ Lefler 1967, p. 29.

These *Indians* are small People, having lost much of their former Numbers, by intestine Broils; but most by the Small-pox, which hath often visited them, sweeping away whole Towns. . . . Neither do I know any Savages that have traded with the *English*, but what have been great Losers by this Distemper.¹²

Despite this, Lawson and his party were well received by the Congarees, as they would be by all of their native hosts until they reached the Tuscaroras.

The next morning, they traveled north with a new guide along the edge of the Wateree valley, crossing rolling uplands strewn with rock. Over the next four weeks, as he entered the upper Wateree-Catawba valley and then traversed the North Carolina Piedmont, Lawson witnessed a cultural landscape that was rapidly changing. Although he did not know it, most of the tribes he visited were no longer residing in their ancestral homelands. Instead, they either had recently moved into regions abandoned by collapsed chiefdoms or had relocated in response to rapid population loss or endemic warfare.

After three days' journey from Congaree Town, Lawson's party came to the Wateree Chickanee (or Wateree) Indians. Mooney suggests that the Waterees were situated on Wateree River below Camden while Rights places them further upstream near Great Falls.¹³ During the sixteenth century when Spanish explorers Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo traveled through here, this region probably was home to a powerful chiefdom called Cofitachequi, and there are several large, late prehistoric village sites with earthen platform mounds in the Camden vicinity. Just before Lawson's party reached the Waterees, they passed several "old fields" where earlier villages once stood. This was not the only time Lawson commented upon archaeological evidence of earlier cultures. In the introduction to his more general treatise on North Carolina's Indians, Lawson observed that technologically crude artifacts had been found in ancient soils.

. . . Earthen Pots. . . are often found under Ground, and at the Foot of the Banks where the Water has wash'd them away. They are, for the most part broken in pieces; but we find them of a different sort, in Comparison of those the *Indians* use at this day, who have had no other, ever since the *English* discover'd *America*. The Bowels of the Earth cannot have alter'd them, since they are thicker, of another Shape, and Composition, and nearly approach to the Urns of the Ancient *Romans*.¹⁴

The Wateree, a Siouan group, do not appear to be descendants of Cofitachequi; instead, their ancestors may have been the Guatari.¹⁵ Charles Hudson has argued that the Guatari were living on Yadkin River near Salisbury when Juan Pardo visited them in the 1560s.¹⁶ Such a connection, however, lacks firm archaeological support at present. Lawson's remarks about the Waterees suggest that they were linguistically and perhaps

¹² Lefler 1967, p. 34.

¹³ Mooney 1894, p. 81; Rights 1957, p. 74.

¹⁴ Lefler 1967, p. 173.

¹⁵ see DePratter 1989.

¹⁶ Hudson 1990.

culturally different from their neighbors and had not been engaged extensively in trade with the English.

We lay in their Cabins all Night, being dark smoaky Holes, as ever I saw in any *Indians* dwell in. This Nation is much more populous than the *Congerees*, and their Neighbors, yet understand not one anothers speech. They are very poor in *English* Effects, several of them having no Guns, making Use of Bows and Arrows. . . .¹⁷

Lawson apparently was much impressed with the Waterees' ability at thievery, noting that they are "great Pilferers, stealing from us any Thing they could lay their Hands on" and are "as ingenuous at picking of Pockets, as any, I believe, the World affords; for they will steal with their Feet,"¹⁸

A short distance beyond the Waterees were the Waxhaws or Wisacks, whom Lawson described as being "of an extraordinary Stature, and call'd by their Neighbors flat Heads."¹⁹ These people practiced cranial deformation by strapping their infants onto cradle-boards and told Lawson that it improved their hunters' ability to see game at greater distances. It also affected their outward appearance, making "the Child's Body and Limbs as straight as an Arrow" and "the Eyes stand a prodigious Way asunder, and the Hair hang over the Forehead like the Eves of a House, which seems very frightful."²⁰

The Waxhaws apparently were the first group visited by Lawson who had a large public building, or townhouse, for receiving visitors, performing ceremonies, and conducting business important to the entire town. Such facilities were common among many other southeastern groups, including the Cherokee and Creek, and typically were placed atop large, pyramidal, earthen mounds during late prehistoric times. Describing a ceremony held at the arrival of a Saponi ambassador, Lawson states:

These Revels are carried on in a House made for that purpose, it being done round with white Benches of fine Canes, joining along the Wall; and a place for the Door being left, which is so low, that a Man must stoop very much to enter therein. This Edifice resembles a large Hay-Rick; its Top being Pyramidal, and much bigger than their other Dwellings, and at the Building whereof, every one assists till it is finish'd. All their Dwelling-Houses are cover'd with Bark, but this differs very much; for, it is very artificially thatch'd with Sedge and Rushes: As soon as finish'd, they place some one of their chiefest Men to dwell therein, charging him with the diligent Preservation thereof. . . . In these State-Houses is transacted all Publick and Private Business, relating to the Affairs of the Government, as the Audience of Foreign Ambassadors from other *Indian* Rulers, Consultation of waging and making War, Proposals of their Trade

¹⁷ Lefler 1967, p. 38.

¹⁸ Lefler 1967, pp. 38, 39.

¹⁹ Lefler 1967, p. 39.

²⁰ Lefler 1967, p. 40.

with neighbouring *Indians*, or the *English* who happen to come amongst them.²¹

The next day Lawson struck out for the Esaw, a constituent group of the Catawba who were said to have “many thousand People.”²² On the way they passed several more Indian towns, all of which had townhouses. That evening they stayed at another Waxhaw village, and the next day they reached an Esaw town after passing by several more towns. On the following day, they

pass'd through a great many Towns, and Settlements, that belong to the *Sugeree-Indians*, no barren Land being found amongst them, but great plenty of Free-Stone, and good Timber. About three in the Afternoon, we reach'd the *Kadapau King's House*, where we met with one *John Stewart*, a *Scot*, then an Inhabitant of *James-River* in *Virginia*, who had traded there for many Years.²³

The Esaw, Sugeree, and Kadapau Indians were settled along the north side of Catawba-Wateree River near present Fort Mill, South Carolina. Over the first half of the eighteenth century, many other tribes, such as the Saura or Cheraw, Keyauwee, and Eno, incorporated with them and they were known to the English collectively as the Catawba Nation. James Adair noted that in 1743 they were comprised of peoples who spoke more than 20 dialects.²⁴ Despite their long history of trade with the English—first the Virginians and then the South Carolinians—and being exposed to the same epidemic diseases which ravaged their neighbors, they were able to sustain their numbers in part by taking in refugees from those other groups.

Archaeologists think that Catawban peoples may have lived along the upper reaches of Catawba River during late prehistoric times and migrated downstream to their 1701 location during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the power of Cofitachequi diminished.²⁵

After staying two days at Kadapau Town, Lawson continued his journey toward Sapona Town, following the Great Trading Path which led northeastward through piedmont North Carolina. The location of this important trail is preserved on eighteenth-century maps by Moseley, Mitchell, Collet, and Mouzon, and in 1931, Douglas Rights incorporated additional documentary evidence in retracing the trail and locating probable sites of Indian villages visited by Lawson.²⁶ The northern terminus of this trail was James River in Virginia. Almost 30 years later, William Byrd II described its importance:

The trading path . . . receives its name from being the route the traders take with their caravans when they go to traffic with the Catawbas

²¹ Lefler 1967, pp. 42-43.

²² Lefler 1967, p. 46.

²³ Lefler 1967, p. 49.

²⁴ Adair 1775, p. 235.

²⁵ Moore 1999.

²⁶ Moseley 1733; Mitchell 1755; Collet 1770; Mouzon 1775; Rights 1931.

and other southern Indians. The Catawbias live about 250 miles beyond Roanoke River, and yet our traders find their account in transporting goods from Virginia to trade with them at their own town. The common method of carrying on this Indian commerce is as follows: gentlemen send for goods proper for such a trade from England and then either venture them out at their own risk to the Indian towns or else credit some traders with them of substance and reputation, to be paid in skins at certain price agreed betwixt them. The goods for the Indian trade consist chiefly in guns, powder, shot, hatchets . . . , kettles, red and blue planes, Duffields, Stroudwater blankets, and some cutlery wares, brass rings, and other trinkets.

These wares are made up into packs and carried upon horses, each load being from 150 to 200 pounds, with which they are able to travel about twenty miles a day if forage happen to be plentiful. Formerly a hundred horses have been employed in one of these Indian caravans under the conduct of fifteen or sixteen persons only, but now the trade is much impaired, insomuch that they seldom go with half that number.²⁷

Along the way to Sapona, Lawson was impressed by the abundance of water fowl, turkeys, and passenger pigeons, which he had not seen since they left Wateree. Regarding the now-extinct passenger pigeon, Lawson remarked that they

were so numerous in these Parts that you might see many Millions in a Flock; they sometimes split off the Limbs of stout Oaks, and other Trees, upon which they roost o' Nights. You may find several *Indian* Towns, of not above 17 Houses, that have more than 100 Gallons of Pigeons Oil, or Fat; they using it with Pulse, or Bread, as we do Butter. . . . The *Indians* take a Light, and go among them in the Night, and bring away some thousands, killing them with long Poles, as they roost in the Trees. At this time of the Year, the Flocks, as they pass by, in great measure, obstruct the Light of the day.²⁸

After six days travel, they reached Sapona Town, situated on the bank of Yadkin River and surrounded by cleared agricultural fields. The town was enclosed by a lightly constructed stockade which, during Lawson's visit, was leveled by a strong northwest wind. The Saponi were newcomers to the Yadkin valley, having resided earlier along Roanoke River in southern Virginia. Along with the Tutelo and Occaneechi, they temporarily removed to Piedmont North Carolina during the 1680s or 1690s, and by 1714 they were all living together at Fort Christanna on Meherrin River, under protection of the Virginia colonial government.²⁹

In part, these migrations were brought about by the persistent threat posed by Iroquois raiding parties who traveled south each winter to make war on the Piedmont Indians. This pattern of endemic warfare likely began several decades earlier and

²⁷ Wright 1966, pp. 307-308.

²⁸ Lefler 1967, pp. 50-51.

²⁹ Alexander 1972, pp. 155-157; Wright 1966, p. 101.

continued into the 1720s.³⁰ Prior to Lawson's arrival, the Saponas had captured five Sinnager, or Seneca, warriors who they intended to torture to death; however, they were spared at the request of a visiting delegation of Tutelos who wanted to preserve peace with the Senecas.

While recounting this event Lawson gives a detailed description of the method of torture that had been planned for the Seneca captives—a gruesome ordeal he would experience ten years later at the hands of the Tuscarora!

Those Captives they did intend to burn, few Prisoners of War escaping that Punishment. The Fire of Pitch-Pine being got ready, and a Feast appointed, which is solemnly kept at the time of their acting this Tragedy, the Sufferer has his Body stuck thick with Light-Wood-Splinters, which are lighted like so many Candles, the tortur'd Person dancing round a great Fire, till his Strength fails, and disables him from making them any farther Pastime.³¹

At the time of Lawson's visit, the Saponas, Tutelos, and Keyauwees were planning to live together in order to protect themselves from the Seneca and other enemies. This was a common strategy pursued by many Piedmont Indians, including the Eno, Shakori, and Adshusheer who Lawson later found living together in the vicinity of present Durham.

Lawson's party stayed at Sapona for four nights and then continued along the Trading Path to the Keyauwees, a trip of about 30 miles that took two days. According to Lawson, the Keyauwee village was similar in size and construction to the Sapona village, and also was surrounded by large cornfields. Douglas Rights identified the site of Keyauwee Town as being where the Trading Path crossed Caraway Creek, just south of Caraway Mountain.³²

An archaeological site at this location, known as the Poole site, was investigated in 1936 by Joffre Coe, Rights, and members of the recently formed Archaeological Society of North Carolina.³³ The two-week excavation uncovered eight shallow graves and several trash-filled pits; however, all but one of these likely date to an earlier occupation of the site. Only one pit contained European-made items that indicate it dates near, but not necessarily at, the period of John Lawson's visit.³⁴

The leader of the Keyauwee was a man named Keyauwees Jack, described as a Congaree who had run away as a boy. In reference to the practice of matrilineal descent common among Piedmont Siouan peoples, Lawson explained Jack's position of power as follows:

He got this Government by Marriage with the Queen; the Female Issue carrying the Heritage, for fear of Imposters; the Savages well knowing,

³⁰ Mooney 1894, p. 60.

³¹ Lefler 1967, p. 53.

³² Rights 1931.

³³ Coe 1937.

³⁴ Ward and Davis 1999, pp. 134-136. These items consisted of glass beads and fragments of English smoking pipes.

how much Frailty possesses the *Indian* Women, betwixt the Garters and the Girdle.³⁵

After two nights as guests of the Keyauwee, Lawson's party split up with most heading straight toward Virginia. Lawson and a companion continued their journey toward Achonechy Town, which took four days as they traveled through northern Randolph, southern Alamance, and central Orange counties. Upon crossing Haw River, probably near the mouth of Alamance Creek, Lawson remarked that it was named for the Sissipahau Indians who lived along it and was also called the Reatkin, a statement that has caused some readers to confuse it with the Yadkin.

About half way between Haw River and Achonechy Town, Lawson came upon a group of four or five Virginians with about 30 horses laden with trade goods. Their leader, an Englishman named Massey, warned of hostile Indians in the area and advised them "to strike down the Country for *Ronoack*, and not think of *Virginia*, because of the *Sinnagers*."³⁶ He also told Lawson to hire a guide at Adshusheer named Enoe Will, an honest and loyal man who would take them safely to the English.

By mid-afternoon they reached the Occaneechi, and Lawson was much impressed with their apparent prosperity.

About Three a Clock we reach'd the Town, and the *Indians* presently brought us good fat Bear, and Venison, which was very acceptable at that time. Their Cabins were hung with a good sort of Tapestry, as fat Bear, and barbakued or dried Venison; no *Indians* having greater Plenty of Provisions than these. The Savages do, indeed, still possess the Flower of *Carolina*, the *English* enjoying only the Fag-end of that fine Country. We had not been in the Town 2 Hours, when *Enoe Will* came into the King's Cabin; which was our Quarters. We ask'd him, if he would conduct us to the *English*, and what he would have for his Pains; he answer'd, he would go along with us, and for what he was to have, he left that to our Discretion.³⁷

The Occaneechi undoubtedly are the best studied archaeologically of all the peoples visited by John Lawson. During his retracing of Lawson's footsteps along the Trading Path in the early 1930s, Douglas Rights identified a site at Hillsborough, near where the Trading Path crossed Eno River, as the probable location of Achonechy Town, and in 1938, Joffre Coe excavated a small trench at this site which revealed evidence of a well-preserved Indian village. This brief project was followed up by much more extensive investigations by UNC archaeologists in 1940 and 1941. Despite finding no evidence of contact between the village's inhabitants and Europeans, it was concluded that the site likely represented Achonechy Town. In 1983, UNC archaeologists renewed work at

³⁵ Lefler 1967, p. 57.

³⁶ Lefler 1967, p. 61.

³⁷ Lefler 1967, p. 61.

this site—named the Wall site—and determined that it was occupied not in 1700 but nearly 200 years earlier. About the same time, another village site was located about 100 yards away, and over the next four summers, archaeologists uncovered what most likely was the village visited by Lawson.³⁸

The settlement was quite small and consisted of a circle of about a dozen houses, each constructed of a frame of saplings and probably covered with bark. In the center of the village was a large sweat lodge that would have been used for cleansing and purification during rituals and to combat epidemic diseases. Like Sapona Town and Keyauwee Town, it was surrounded by a defensive enclosure or palisade. Three small cemeteries lay outside this palisade.

As with the Sapona and Tutelo, the Occaneechi settled only briefly in Piedmont North Carolina, and their village at Hillsborough appears to have been occupied for less than a decade. Their community also was quite small, comprised of no more than about 50-75 individuals. What is perhaps most striking about Achonechy Town is that the associated cemeteries contain the graves of 26 individuals, a silent testament to the very high mortality rates experienced by Piedmont Indians following European contact.³⁹ The Occaneechi may indeed have had “greater Plenty of Provisions,” but they paid a steep price for their prosperity.

When Lawson and Enoe Will set out the next morning, they left the Trading Path and headed eastward along “a sad stony Way” to the town of Adshusheer, about 14 miles away. Adshusheer, a palisaded village located “beside a pretty Rivulet” in the vicinity of Durham, was home to the Adshusheer, Shakori, and Eno Indians. These tribes apparently were so reduced by disease that they had joined together for mutual protection.

Adshusheer was the last Siouan village on Lawson’s long journey and also the last Indian village he could regard as friendly toward the English. As he and Enoe Will traveled further east, they entered the coastal plain and Tuscarora territory. The first Tuscarora settlement they encountered, called Lower Quarter, apparently was situated on a western tributary of Neuse River in the vicinity of Falls Lake. Lawson was rather unimpressed with the town, remarking that it was “a Parcel of nasty smoaky Holes, much like the *Waterrees*; their Town having a great Swamp running directly through the Middle thereof.”⁴⁰ He also noted with curiosity that most of the inhabitants had only one eye, but could not ascertain how or why they were so afflicted.

The Tuscaroras were not as hospitable as his previous Indian hosts had been, due to both the relative scarcity of food and perhaps a growing dislike of the English. A few days later, during an encounter with two Tuscarora traders who were going among the Occaneechis and Shakoris to trade wooden bowls and ladles for deerskins, Enoe Will was told that “The *English*, to whom he was going, were very wicked People; and, That they threatened the *Indians* for Hunting near their Plantations.”⁴¹ While Will dismissed these accusations,

³⁸ Davis et al. 1998.

³⁹ Driscoll et al. 2001.

⁴⁰ Lefler 1967, p. 63.

⁴¹ Lefler 1967, p. 64.

claiming that the two traders were just “a couple of Hog-stealers,” there was an element of truth in their words. This animosity grew during the following decade as the Tuscaroras became increasingly dissatisfied with English traders, whom they generally regarded as cheats, and with the restrictions English plantation owners placed on neighboring Indians. Open hostilities eventually broke out in September, 1711, with the Tuscarora War, and John Lawson was the first casualty.⁴²

It appears that by the time Lawson departed from Lower Quarter, he had grown weary of keeping detailed entries in his journal. His 11-day journey to Pamlico River is only briefly described, even though it took him through the heart of Tuscarora country. Because of this, we cannot be sure exactly where he traveled. Douglas Rights, who has provided one of the best interpretations of Lawson’s route, did not attempt to locate his path after crossing Neuse River near the falls.⁴³ Hugh Lefler suggests that Lawson crossed Neuse River much further downstream at Cliffs of the Neuse below Goldsboro, but this interpretation is almost certainly in error.⁴⁴ It seems likely that, once crossing Neuse River, he generally followed the divide between the Neuse and Contentnea Creek, since he described the land as “very level Country and most Pine Land” and does not mention crossing any large streams.

About half way from Lower Quarter to Pamlico River, perhaps in the vicinity of Nahunta Swamp, Lawson came upon a large, temporary hunting camp which he described as follows:

We had not gone past two Miles, e’er we met with about 500 *Tuskeruros* in one Hunting-Quarter. They had made themselves Streets of Houses, built with Pine-Bark, not with round Tops, as they commonly use, but Ridge-Fashion, after the manner of most other *Indians*. We got nothing amongst them but Corn, Flesh being not plentiful, by reason of the great Number of their People. For tho’ they are expert Hunters, yet they are too populous for one Range, which makes Venison very scarce. . . . About two a Clock, we reach’d one of their Towns, in which there was no body left, but an Old Woman or two; the rest being gone to their Hunting-Quarters.⁴⁵

After two more days of traveling through swampy land, they crossed by canoe a river the Indians called Chattookau, probably lower Contentnea Creek. This area was said to be “very thick of *Indian* Towns and Plantations” and very likely was the same area where several Tuscarora towns are shown on the Barnwell-Hammerton map of 1721.⁴⁶

The following day they reached Pamlico River at a point about 20 miles above the English settlements. They crossed the river by canoe, went about six miles further, and spent a stormy night of snow and rain sheltered only by pieces of bark under a large oak.

⁴² Lee 1963, pp. 21-23.

⁴³ Rights 1957.

⁴⁴ Lefler 1967, pp. xiv-xv.

⁴⁵ Lefler 1967, p. 65.

⁴⁶ Cumming 1998, plate 48a.

The next day, after traveling 12 more miles, they reached the plantation of Richard Smith, a large landholder, and concluded their journey.

John Lawson and Coastal Carolina Indians

By the time *A New Voyage to Carolina* was published in 1709, John Lawson had spent almost a decade in the colony, during which time he gained prominence both as a landholder and surveyor. In both of these roles, he became intimately familiar with the natural and cultural geography of the region. As a surveyor, and particularly after he was named Surveyor General, he traveled extensively throughout coastal North Carolina, and these travels brought him into contact with the native peoples, such as the Pamlico, Woccon, and Tuscarora, who lived along Albemarle and Pamlico sounds and along the rivers which flow into them. In fact, his house on Neuse River, where he lived with "a young Indian Fellow and a Bull-Dog," was less than a mile from the Neusiok town of Chattooka, situated at the present site of New Bern.⁴⁷ In contrast to his growing familiarity with the customs of neighboring Indians, there is no evidence that he had further contact with any of the piedmont tribes he visited in the winter of 1701.

Lawson actually wrote two detailed accounts of North Carolina's native peoples, both contained in *A New Voyage to Carolina*. The first was his journal, just described. This presumably was written mostly during his exploration of the backcountry but perhaps was embellished later. In his opening sentence of *A New Voyage to Carolina's* preface, Lawson gave clear indication that he fully appreciated the importance of such accurate, firsthand narrative:

Tis a great Misfortune that most of our Travellers, who go to this vast Continent in America, are Persons of the meaner Sort, and generally of a very slender Education; who being hir'd by the Merchants, to trade amongst the Indians, in which Voyages they often spend several Years, are yet, at their Return, uncapable of giving any reasonable Account of what they met withal in those remote Parts; tho' the Country abounds with Curiosities worthy a nice Observation.⁴⁸

Because we know from Lawson's journal generally where he traveled, the names of the villages he visited, and the approximate locations of those villages, it has been an invaluable document for anthropologists and historians alike reconstructing the lifeways of specific tribes. In particular, it is by far our best documentary source on the small tribal societies of the Carolina Piedmont.

Lawson's other treatise on native peoples, titled "An Account of the Indians of North Carolina," provides details about various aspects of Indian culture and physical characteristics, and is actually more extensive than his journal. However, while he sometimes refers to the customs of specific tribes and certainly drew upon his experiences while traversing the Piedmont, most of this information cannot be ascribed to a specific group. Lawson's knowledge of native lifeways presented here most likely

⁴⁷ see Lefler 1967, pp. xvii-xviii.

⁴⁸ Lefler 1967, p. 5.

drew heavily from observations of his Indian neighbors: the Pamlico, Woccon, Tuscarora, and other coastal plain tribes.

Of these, the Tuscarora, Nottoway, and Meherrin were culturally related and spoke Iroquoian languages. The Tuscarora lived in the inner coastal plain within the Neuse and Roanoke drainages while the Nottoway and Meherrin were situated along the upper tributaries of Chowan River in southern Virginia. The Tuscarora were the most populous North Carolina group east of the Cherokee during the 1700s, and Lawson estimated that their 15 towns contained about 1,200 fighting men.

Most of the villages along the Carolina sounds were inhabited by Indians who spoke Algonkian languages and were culturally distinct from the Iroquoian speakers. Along Albemarle Sound and Chowan River were villages of the Chawanoke, Paspatank, Poteskeit, Weapemeoc, and Roanoke tribes. The ancestors of these tribes and their customs are portrayed in the watercolor drawings of John White.⁴⁹ To the south, along Pamlico Sound and its tributaries, were villages of the Hatteras, Machapungs, Pamlico, Bear River, and Neusiok tribes. These latter groups would have been most familiar to Lawson.

Finally, the Woccon, whom Lawson was familiar enough with to provide an extensive word list, spoke a Siouan language, associating them linguistically with many of the tribes he encountered while traveling through the Piedmont. These tribes included the Saponi, Tutelo, Keyauwee, Occaneechi, and Shakori, and, by the time Lawson's book was published in 1709, they had abandoned the piedmont and moved nearer to the North Carolina colonial frontier.

Lawson attributed much of this linguistic diversity to inter-tribal warfare, remarking that:

. . .the continual Wars these Savages maintain, one Nation against another, which sometimes hold for some Ages, killing and making Captives, till they become so weak thereby, that they are forced to make Peace for want of Recruits, to supply their Wars; and the Difference of Languages, that is found amongst these Heathens, seems altogether strange. For it often appears, that every dozen Miles, you meet with an *Indian* Town, that is quite different from the others you last parted withal. . . .⁵⁰

Just as there was great linguistic diversity among Lawson's Indian "neighbors," there also were many cultural differences. In part, this diversity among neighboring Indians was the culmination of a process of depopulation and subsequent migration begun earlier in the seventeenth century; however, the lower Neuse River where Lawson lived the last decade of his life also was near the juncture of more ancient territories occupied by Algonkian, Iroquoian, and Siouan peoples. For these reasons, Lawson's more general account of North Carolina Indians, while extremely interesting, is somewhat problematic when trying to construct a cultural picture of a specific tribe or when trying to ascribe particular traits to peoples of one linguistic group.

⁴⁹ Hulton 1984.

⁵⁰ Lefler 1967, p. 233.

Conclusion

It is perhaps fitting to conclude my remarks about John Lawson by briefly relating the circumstances of his death. In early 1710 Lawson returned to North Carolina from England where he had spent much of the previous year in London arranging for the publication of his book. While in London he also joined with a Swiss land company headed by Baron Christopher Von Graffenried and Franz Louis Michel to establish a colony in Carolina for Palatines and Swiss religious refugees. On Lawson's return voyage, he was accompanied by a group of Palatine settlers. Lawson was responsible for selecting a site for the colony, which Von Graffenried named New Bern after Bern, Switzerland, and he chose the confluence of the Trent and Neuse rivers, where the Neusiok town of Chattooka had stood and where he owned land.

This further encroachment by white settlers was not well received by neighboring Indians and in September 1711, while Lawson was exploring upstream along Neuse River with Von Graffenried, the two were captured and taken to the Tuscarora town of Catechna. According to Von Graffenried, the two were tried by a group of elders but found not guilty. Before they could be released, new charges were made against Lawson by visiting Indians from the lower Neuse and, following a heated exchange, both men were sentenced to death. The Baron was able to talk his way out of the sentence and eventually was released; however, Lawson was not so fortunate. While both the Baron and an accompanying black slave were unsure of how Lawson met his end, Christopher Gale, writing a few months later, stated that the Tuscarora "stuck him full of fine small splinters of torch wood like hog's bristles and so set them gradually afire"—the same method of torture that Lawson described a decade earlier while traveling through the backcountry.⁵¹

Although some historians have laid partial blame on Von Graffenried for saving himself at the expense of Lawson, William Byrd II's commentary on the incident probably is closer to the truth. Writing two decades later about events leading up to the Tuscarora War, Byrd wrote: "It was upon that provocation they resented their wrongs a little too severely upon Mr. Lawson, who, under color of being Surveyor General, had encroached too much upon their territories. . . ."⁵² To the Tuscarora and other neighboring Indians, John Lawson personified all the ills that accompanied Indian-White contact, and for this the most articulate observer of native North Carolinians and their customs was put to death.

⁵¹ Lefler 1967, p. xxxvi.

⁵² Wright 1966, p. 303.

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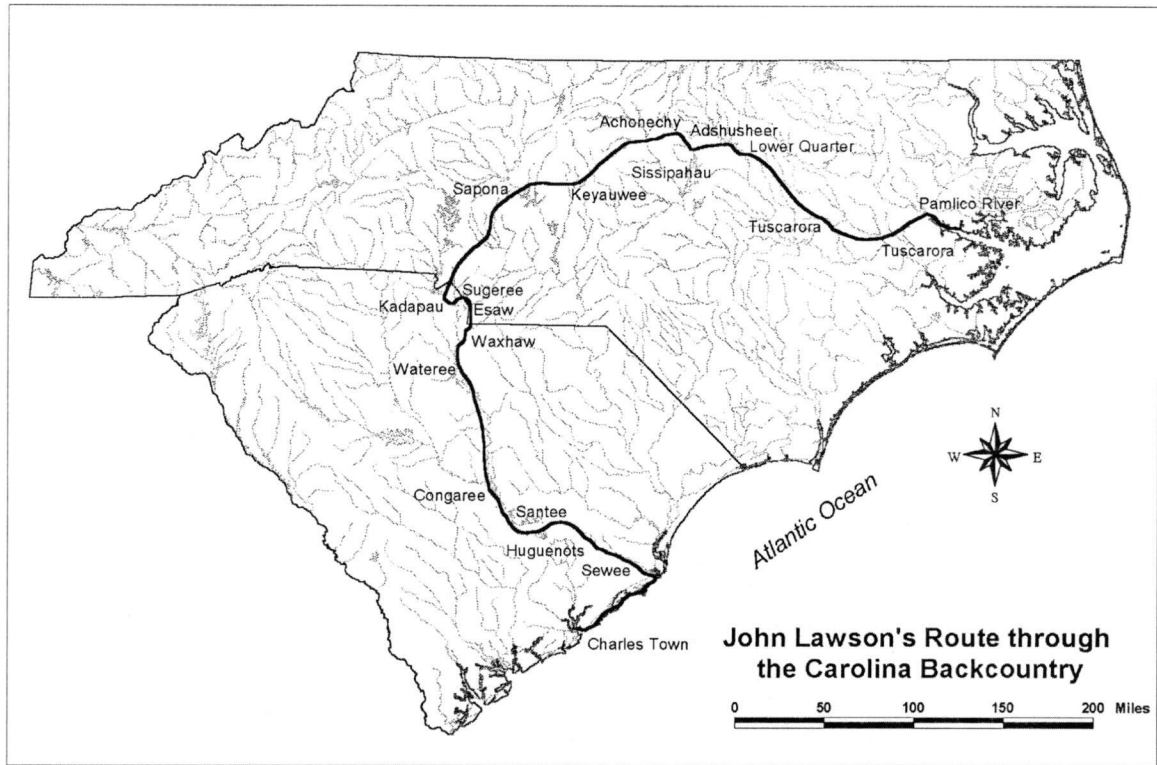


Figure 1. John Lawson's 1700-1701 route through the Carolina Backcountry.