

Life in Colonial North Carolina

Primary Source Sets from the Colonial Court Records Collection

About These Materials

This collection of primary source sets allows students to select a topic of interest and evaluate themed primary sources from the Colonial Court Records at the State Archives of North Carolina. Within each category, users will find digital images of the primary source records, transcriptions of these records, and questions to prompt reflection and discussion for each category and for individual records.

Content Warning

The Colonial Court Records have been preserved for their historical significance as government records. However, some records in this collection contain content that may be harmful or difficult to view, including language that reflects outdated, biased, offensive views as well as descriptions of conflict and violence.

Historical Era

Colonial North Carolina (1600-1763)

Skills

Information Literacy, Transcription, Reading Comprehension, Historical Analysis

Grade level: AP U.S. History, College level

Standards (as of Fall 2021):

North Carolina Social Studies

- I.1.3 Gathering and Evaluating Sources
 - Summarize the central ideas and meaning of primary and secondary sources through the use of literacy strategies.
 - Determine the origin, context, and bias of primary and secondary sources.
 - Differentiate between facts and interpretation of sources.

North Carolina English Language Arts

- RI.11-12.9 Analyze foundational U.S. and/or British documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.

AP American History

- AH.B.1.3 Critique multiple perspectives of American identity in terms of oppression, stereotypes, diversity, inclusion, and exclusion
- AH.G.1.2 Explain how geographic conditions and expansion have presented both opportunities and challenges in the development of America

- AH.H.3.2 Use historical empathy and contextualization to deconstruct multiple perspectives of individuals and groups within various turning points

Suggested Activity

Classroom Activity

For this activity, curated records have been organized into thematic categories that provide clues about life in the North Carolina colony. Students may work individually or work in small groups. They may review all the records for one category or specific records from multiple categories.

For each record, complete the following steps:

1. Observe the document. What is it? When was it made? By whom?
2. Transcribe the text. Use [these tips](#) for transcribing historical documents.
(**Educator's note:** the length and legibility of each record varies. Some students will be able to transcribe a record quickly, but others will not be able to transcribe everything. Determine how much time you will allot to this part of the exercise in advance. Discuss what challenges and surprises students found as they began this transcription activity. Then offer the transcriptions provided here so that students can complete the rest of the exercise.)
3. Compare your transcription to the one provided.
4. Analyze the text. Use the discussion questions provided in each transcription to prompt your analysis. What conclusions can you interpret from the document? What clues might you draw about the people involved? What additional questions does it raise? What biases or silences in the record do you observe? If you wanted to continue to research one of the individuals named in the documents, how would you use this document as a steppingstone for more information?

Follow-Up Activity

Have students become historians. Based on the records they transcribed and analyzed, ask students to write a short narrative to describe the document(s) and the stories of the people named within them. They should use information gleaned from the primary source sets, along with secondary sources to develop historical context, to paint a picture of what life was like in colonial North Carolina. Students should cite their sources.

Background

Adapted from [NCpedia](#).

The first permanent English settlers in North Carolina emigrated from the tidewater area of southeastern Virginia. The first of these "overflow" settlers moved into the area of the Albemarle Sound in northeast North Carolina around 1650. In 1663, Charles II granted a charter to eight English noblemen, called "Lords Proprietors," who had helped him regain the throne of England. The territory was to be called "Carolina" in honor of Charles I.

Between 1663 and 1729, North Carolina was under the control of the Lords Proprietors and their descendants. The small group commissioned colonial officials and authorized the governor and his council to grant lands in the name of the Lords Proprietor.

In 1729, seven of the Lords Proprietors sold their interests in North Carolina to the Crown and North Carolina became a royal colony. The eighth proprietor, Lord Granville, retained economic interest and continued granting land in the northern part of North Carolina. The Crown supervised all political and administrative functions in the colony until 1775.

Colonial government in North Carolina changed little between the proprietary and royal periods, the only major difference being who appointed colonial officials. There were two primary units of government—the governor and his council and a colonial assembly with representatives elected by the qualified voters of the county. Colonial courts, unlike today's courts, rarely involved themselves in formulating governmental policy. All colonial officials were appointed by the Lords Proprietors until 1729 and by the Crown afterwards. Members of the colonial assembly were elected from the various precincts (which became known as counties after 1735) and from certain towns which had been granted representation.