

An Act to Encourage the Settlement of America (1707) ^[1]

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the settler population in North America was nearing 300,000. The British had laid claim to land spanning from present-day Maine to present-day Georgia. Census data gathered by the British Colonial Government suggests that Virginia was home to 70,000 settlers in 1700, while estimates suggest that North Carolina was home to less than 10,000 European settlers.

North Carolina's smaller population was a sticking point; it made communication, travel, and trade throughout the colonies more challenging. The natural geography of the state's coast combined with the sparse population created the perfect refuge for pirates and enemies of the crown. And so, in 1707, An Act to Encourage the Settlement of This Country [Carolina North] was passed in an effort to encourage more emigration into the territory, declaring that it was possible to be forgiven of crime or debts in many circumstances if one were willing to settle in North Carolina. A transcription of the resolution is below.

Whereas it hath pleased Almighty God so to bless and prosper the English plantations on the maine Land of America that all the Sea Coast from the most Easterne parts of New England to the Southermost part of Carrolina with all the Ports and Harbours thereon are possesst by English under the dominion ^[2] of our most gracious Soverreign Lady Ann by the Grace of God of England Scotland France and Ireland Queen Defender of the faith save only one Tract of land lying in this Government which lying waste the Comunication of her Majties Subjects by land is not only interrupted but the Enemy in time of Warr and Pyrates in time of Peace have hitherto made use of the Harbours therein to careen and fitt their vessells as also to Wood and Water to the great annoyance of her Majties Subjects trading along the Coast and the Place being inhabited (as has been lately discovered) only by some fugitive Indians under no manner of Government and living chiefly by Rapine ^[3] who do murder or hold in Slavery all persons that either by Shipwrack or passing in small vessells so unhappily fall under their Power And whereas the Inhabitants of this Government by reason of their fewness are subject to the dayly Insults of the Heathen owing their Lives and safety's to the courtesy of the Heathen rather then their own strength, therefore for the more speedy peopling the said Tract of Land and for the uniteing her Majts Empire in America and preventing the Enemy from Harbouring in those parts for the subdueing the Inhabitants and security of her Majties Subjects trading along the sea coast as also of the Inhabitants settled in this Government we pray that it may be enacted and it is hereby enacted by his Excell: the Palatine & the rest of the true and absolute Lords Proprs by and with the consent & advice of this present grand assembly and the authority thereof. And it is hereby enacted that no person or persons whatsoever who from and after ratification of this act shall transport themselves into this Government and shall continue to be an Inhabitant or Inhabitants here to plant & inhabit shall be arrested sued or impleaded in any Court or imprison'd for any debt whither the same be by Bill Bond or other reckoning or acct whatsoever contracted before their arrival here till and after five years after their arrival Provided allways that this act nor anything therein contained shall in no wise be constructed to protect any person or persons Indebted to our Sovereigne Lady the Queen her Heires and successors or to the public account of the place or Government where they have lived or as Guardians & Trustees for Orphans Estates nor any person or persons who shall transport him or themselves from our neighbouring Government her Majties Dominions and Colony of Virginia nor any persons indebted to any of her Majties Subjects living within the aforesaid Collony of Virginia who upon pretence of coming from any other place shall plead the benefitt of the said act nor any persons indebted for any wares, goods and merchandizes the effects whereof they shall bring into or otherwise receive within this Government nor any person indebted for any debts contracted upon any account whatsoever within six months before their arrival here Provided also and it is hereby Enacted by the authority aforesaid that what person or person so ever shall at any time hereafter transport him or themselves into this Government and having once had the benefitt of this act shall depart hence and againe afterwards transported him or themselves into this Government shall have or receive no benefitt or advantage by such his or their transportation anything herein contained to yecontrary ^[4] notwithstanding

(Endorsed)

Referred to in Colonel Seymours L^{re} of the 16 Augst last.

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