

Appendix C. John Lawson ^[1]

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John Lawson (1674? - 1711) was a British explorer, naturalist and writer. He played an important role in the history of colonial North Carolina.

Little is known definitively about his early life but it seems probable that he had a good education and was well-placed in society. After an acquaintance in London assured him that "Carolina was the best country," Lawson sailed for America and arrived in Charleston on August 15, 1700.

On December 28, 1700, he led a small expedition out of Charleston and up the Santee River by canoe and then on foot to explore the Carolina backcountry. Along the way he took careful note of the vegetation, wildlife and, in particular, the many Indian tribes he encountered. He traveled nearly 600 miles through the wilderness, ending his journey near the mouth of the Pamlico River.

Lawson wrote an account of his adventure, (1709), in which he described the native inhabitants and the natural environment of the region. The book was an instant success and several editions were published including versions in German and French. The resulting publicity attracted many settlers to North Carolina. (An [electronic version of the book](#) ^[2] is available on the *Documenting the American South* website.)

After his expedition, Lawson settled near the Pamlico River and earned a living as a private land surveyor. In 1705 he was appointed deputy surveyor for the Lords Proprietor of Carolina and in 1708 he succeeded Edward Moseley to become surveyor-general.

Lawson played a major role in the founding of two of North Carolina's earliest settlements -- Bath and New Bern. On March 8, 1705, Bath became the first town [incorporated](#) ^[3] in what was to become North Carolina. Part of the incorporated land was owned by Lawson and he became one of the first town commissioners. Later he became clerk of the court and public register for Bath County.

In 1709 Lawson returned to London to oversee the publication of his book, *A New Voyage to Carolina*. While in London he represented the colony in a boundary dispute with Virginia. He also organized a group of [Palatine](#) ^[4] Germans to settle in Carolina and returned with them to in 1710 to found New Bern on the Neuse River.

In September, 1711 Lawson and his associate Christopher von Graffenreid were captured by Tuscarora Indians while ascending the Neuse River. They released von Graffenreid but tortured and killed Lawson. Shortly thereafter, tensions between Indians and settlers erupted into a bloody conflict known as the Tuscarora War.

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