

Anglican minister writes of

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his frontier adventure

Before the American Revolution, South Carolina was a Royal Colony.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

The official church of the colony was the Church of England, or Anglican. The back settlements, such as those in York, Lancaster and Chester counties, were overwhelmingly Scots-Irish and Presbyterian.

There was no love lost between the Anglicans and the Presbyterians, but this did not keep a newly ordained Angli-

can minister by the name of Charles Woodmason from attempting to start Anglican congregations in the backcountry.

In 1766, Woodmason began a six-year stint of ministering to rough frontiersmen. He kept a journal, and from that journal we get a good idea of what life was like in this area at that time.

If one ignores his rantings about the "beggarly Irish Presbyterians," there is still much to be gained by reading his journal, which was published back in 1953 by the University of North Carolina under the title, "The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution."

Woodmason observed much poverty. He wrote that many of

the men and women of his congregation were "bareheaded, barelegged and barefoot." Yet, he said the heat was such that he could hardly bear the weight of his wig and gown during service. (There were communities that were exceptions to Woodmason's assessments. The Waxhaws, for instance, in no way fit Woodmason's descriptions.)

After two years of constant travel, Woodmason estimated he had ridden nearly 6,000 miles, most of it on one horse. He had baptized nearly 1,200 children, given more than 200 sermons and "raised," or initiated, 30 congregations. He had distributed books, medicines, seeds, fishhooks and small tools.

March 1768 was sharp and cold.

Woodmason wrote, "Their Cabbins quite open and expos'd. Little or no Bedding, or anything to cover them. Not a drop of anything, save Cold Water to drink. And all their Cloathing, a Shirt and Trousers... The Indians are better Cloathed and Lodged." And then he could not help adding, "All this arises from their Indolence and Laziness."

When he became ill, as he did several times, Woodmason reflected not only on his own misery but the misery of others: "No Physician, No Medicines, No Necessaries, Nurses, or Care in Sickness. If You are taken in any Disorder, there You must lye till Nature gets the better of the Disease or Death relieves you. Tis the

fashion of these people to abandon all Persons when Sick, instead of visiting them, So that a Stranger who has no Relatives or Connexions, is in a most Terrible Situation!"

Still, in spite of his troubles, Woodmason traveled on, baptizing, marrying and burying among his widely scattered congregations. He carried with him what he termed his "Necessaries." These included (during the best of times): "biskets," cheese, a pint of rum, some sugar, chocolate, tea or coffee. To these items he added cups, a knife, spoon, plate, towels and linen. He said he was "loaded like a Trooper."

He felt himself well off, for in many places he observed that the

people only had a gourd to drink from and did not have a plate, knife or spoon. "There's not a Cabbin but has 10 or 12 Young Children in it. When the Boys are 18 and Girls 14 they marry, so that in many Cabbins You will see 10 or 15 Children. Children and Grand Children of one Size, and the mother looking as Young as the Daughter."

Woodmason added, "Yet these Poor People enjoy good Health ..." He could not help but wonder why, and thought it must be the isolation which cut off the "Epidemic Disorders" of the cities.

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