

BY LOUISE PETTUS
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The first meeting of the Lords Proprietors of Carolina was held on May 23, 1663, in England. Fortunately, minutes were kept and they have survived under the title "The Shaftesbury Papers and Other Records Relating to Carolina and the First Settlement on Ashley River Prior to the Year 1676."

The title Earl of Shaftesbury had not yet been created in 1663 for Anthony Ashley Cooper — "My Lord Ashley" as his secretary, John Locke, called him. John Locke, author of the first constitution for Carolina, later became a leading political philosopher and author.

When six of the eight proprietors met that day in May, they agreed upon a list of things that were necessary in order to initiate the settlement of Carolina. First on the list was the appointment of an "Ingeneir & Surveyor for Carolina." The surveyor was to be paid 20 shillings weekly. The proprietors intended that settlements be laid out, and that they would reserve for themselves 20,000 acres in every settlement. All courthouses and public buildings were to be placed on the land reserved for the proprietors.

At that first meeting only six points, or "orders," were decided. The last called for the printing of maps of the province, to be accompanied by a description of the land and the terms by which planters could secure acreage for themselves.

The first engineer and surveyor general appointed for Carolina was M. Robert Vanquillin de la Prairie. This gentleman never came to Carolina, but went to New Jersey instead. Thomas Woodward was named next, but apparently never got any farther than Virginia. Then John Vassail was named. A few months later Mons. Laperey was named, at a salary of 4 pounds a month. None proved satisfactory.

The first surveyor to perform a real service for the proprietors was John Culpepper, who laid out the first site of Charles Town. The Charles Town plat is on a piece of parchment measuring 21 inches by 13½ inches. Nine years later Charles Town was moved. The surveyor was instructed to "take care to lay out the streets broad and in straight lines."

Getting A Land Title In Early Carolina Not Easy

South Carolina's Story

The making of a state



The paperwork was incredibly time-consuming. There were no printed forms to be filled in. All of the work was laboriously written by hand with goose quill pens. The surveyor general's pleas for more clerks went unheeded. Finally, he began abstracting the information and was able to convince the proprietors to allow him to hire deputy surveyors to do the field work.

Surveying in the late 1600s was not easy in the swampy coastal lands. The early surveys were almost all run by boat. There were snakes, alligators, pumas, swarms of gnats, and other creeping and crawling things to contend with besides quicksand and constantly changing water levels.

There was one constant in a surveyor's life. The fees for surveying changed little during the entire colonial period. For more than 100 years the rates were a half penny sterling for each acre of land — 100 acres was surveyed for 50 cents. The fee to make the plat and record it was 11 shillings and 8 pence — a little under \$2.

It was not easy for a settler to get title to land in early Carolina. First he had to go to an office in Charles Town to apply for a warrant. (The warrant guaranteed that no one else has received a title to the same piece of land.) The warrant was taken to the surveyor general, who made out a plat and filled out some papers. Then the plat and the papers were taken to the secretary of state, who drew up the grant.

The grant was not valid until the applicant got the signatures of the governor of the province and the council. No one was authorized to sign for the governor or the council members. Sometimes the governor left the colony to go to England, and would be gone for months, or years. If the settler was lucky enough to get all of the signatures, he could officially record his grant.