



South Carolina's Story The making of a state

Henry Woodward Was Fascinating Colonial Character

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One of the most fascinating characters to emerge from the colonial period didn't attain high office, win battles, or hold vast tracts of land. His name is Henry Woodward and he is often described as the first English settler in South Carolina.

Although the records for the period are sketchy, it is generally believed that he was born around 1646, most likely in Barbados.

As a teen-ager he joined the Carolina settlement, which began in 1664 near Cape Fear. Two years later, Woodward accompanied Robert Sandford on his historic voyage of exploration to Port Royal.

Woodward volunteered to remain behind and learn more about the Indians in the area. A deal was worked out with the Indians, whereby the son of the local Indian chief was given permission by Sandford to accompany his exploration back to Barbados so that he could learn the English language and the customs of the white man.

The whole vast territory of Carolina was turned over to Henry Woodward to hold as "tenant at (sic) will of the Right Honorable Lord Proprietors." Before leaving, Sandford warned the Indians that he hoped to find Woodward in good condition when he returned.

But the young lad had no problem with the Indians. He spent four years among them, learning to live the Indian way and to speak their language.

England's rival, Spain, however, was operating in the area, and Woodward eventually was captured and carried off to Florida. For a time he lived in St. Augustine with a Spanish priest.

But soon he escaped when the pirate Robert Searles raided the town. Woodward became Searle's surgeon until Searle's ship was wrecked in a storm in 1669. Woodward managed to take refuge on an island. He was rescued by one of the ships that was carrying the passengers who would establish Charles Town.

Woodward was allowed to accompany the expedition and he eventually played an important part in the settlement and development of the Charles Town Colony.

Because he was familiar with the Indian language and customs, Woodward served as an intermediary and interpreter.

Henry Woodward became an important agent of the government, developing a close working relationship with the Proprietor, Lord Ashley (later the Earl of Shaftsbury) who made good use of Woodward's knowledge of and influence with the Indians. In 1677 Woodward became Shaftsbury's deputy. Woodward served as a public relations man of sorts, traveling far inland and making friends for the English.

Woodward began his explorations soon after the settlement of the Charles Town colony in 1670. In 1654 some Indians appeared in the vicinity of Charles Town to initiate trade with the white man. Woodward was asked to go and meet them. He learned that they were from the Westo tribe, then living on the western sides of the Savannah River where Augusta now stands.

Shaftsbury allowed the young doctor to go back with the Indians and negotiate a trade agreement. An alliance was forged whereby the English supplied the Westos with weapons, which they used to carry out raids against Spanish settlements along the coast of Georgia. The Westos, during these early years, became the cornerstone of South Carolina's Indian policy.

Historian David Duncan Wallace, in assessing the role played by Henry

Woodward in the early history of South Carolina, wrote that Woodward became "the significant factor in making South Carolina the most important part of the southern Indian trade and the main bulwark against the influence of the Spanish and French."

Woodward later led the expansion of the trading frontier of Carolina westward to towns of the Lower Creeks in the middle Chattahoochee region, thus laying the foundation for an English alliance with the Lower Creeks.

In 1682 he visited England and obtained a commission to return and explore the interior beyond the Savannah River.

The details of Henry Woodward's last years are shrouded in mystery, but it is believed that he died about 1686.