

# Researching in North Carolina

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From insecure Colony to frontier matriarch, let's simplify the unique geologic secrets and travel patterns of North Carolina that will lead us to new discoveries and records. Then we will 'beat the bounds' focusing on the state's exceptional records and the people who made it their home. The Appalachian Mountains wind through the western part of the state, covered with hardwood forests and forming the lush landscape of the region. Mount Mitchell is the highest peak in the state, and at 6,684 feet, it is also the tallest mountain in the eastern United States.

Nearly half of North Carolina, called the Piedmont, located in the central part of the state, is an area of gently rolling foothills with rock outcropping. The North Carolina coastal plain is filled with beaches, sand dunes and wetlands. The coastal area is also full of history, dating back to the 16th century, when the first English settlement was established. North Carolina is the colony and state that shapes the South and provides the impetus to move west.

North Carolina has three distinct geographical divisions, based on geological formations — the coastal plain, the Piedmont, and the mountains. The coastal plain ranges from sea level to 500 feet. The fall line marks the boundary between the coastal plain and the Piedmont. This region is divided into two areas — the tidewater and the inner coastal plain. The coastal plain covers approximately 21,000 square miles or approximately 45% of the state. The tidewater and sounds extend approximately 30 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean. Rivers in this region rise and fall with the ocean tide, hence the name, tidewater region. Major towns in the tidewater area are Washington, Elizabeth City, Edenton, New Bern, Beaufort, Wilmington, Southport, and Morehead City. The inner coastal plain stretches from the tidewater to the fall line. Nathaniel Batts became the first permanent white settler in North Carolina in 1655. He built a small home at the western end of the Albemarle Sound and traded with the Native Americans. Batts also bought land from the Weapemeoc Indians. This was the first recorded deed for North Carolina land.

Piedmont means "at the foot or base of the mountains." Elevation in this geologic region ranges from 500 - 1500 ft above sea level. This region is also the center of the state's urban population. Piedmont is actually a plateau that covers approximately 22,000 sq. miles or approximately 45% of the state. This area equals the coastal plain. When the rivers of North Carolina flow eastward from the Piedmont onto the Coastal Plain, they leave a geologic zone where the river bottom is hard rock and encounter the Coastal Plain sediments. The energy of the water carves a deeper channel in the softer sediments, creating waterfalls. The edge of the Piedmont/Coastal Plain is marked by a line of waterfalls or the Fall Line at the point where the rivers move from harder to softer bedrock.

North Carolina's mountains are part of the Appalachian Mountain Chain. The eastern range is known as the Blue Ridge Mountains. The western ranges of this chain include the Great Smoky Mountains and Unakas. There are 43 peaks in North Carolina with an altitude of more than 6,000 feet. This geologic region ranges from 1500 - 6600 ft in elevation. The North Carolina mountains cover some 9,000 square miles or approximately 10 % of the state.

There are four rivers in North Carolina that flow into the sounds. The Chowan, Roanoke, Tar-Pamlico, and the Neuse. The Cape Fear River is the only river in North Carolina that flows directly into the Atlantic Ocean. North Carolina was established with rural agricultural settlements. By the late 17th century, planters of the tidewater region held most of the political power and the best land. At the same time, however, rural farmers, who worked smaller tracts of land, sat in popular assemblies and found their way into political office. Along the rivers, settlers quickly learned to combine agriculture and commerce, and marketplace cities became a major source of prosperity. These same hardwood forests

brought revenue. North Carolina also produced rice and indigo. By 1750 more than 100,000 people lived in the two colonies of North and South Carolina.

In 1585 Sir Walter Raleigh established the first British colony in North America, on Roanoke Island off the coast of North Carolina. It was later abandoned, and a second effort two years later also proved a failure. It would be 20 years before the British would try again.

The colonists' first glimpse of the new land was a vista of dense woods providing a rich source of game and abundant raw materials used to build houses and furnishings. Rivers linked lands between the eastern coast and the Piedmont falling from the Appalachian Mountains towards the sea. However, these dense forests and the Appalachian Mountains discouraged settlement beyond the fall line. Only trappers and traders ventured further into the wilderness. The early colonists built their settlements compactly along the coast. As early as the 1650s, the Albemarle Sound region of northern North Carolina was inhabited by settlers trickling down from Virginia. The first proprietary governor arrived in 1664. A remote area even today, Albemarle's first town was the arrival of a group of French Huguenots in 1704.

King Charles I, son of James I, granted to his attorney general, Robert Heath in 1629 a large piece of land in the New World extending from Florida to the Albemarle Sound. Charles named it "Carolana" after himself. Heath was not able to establish a colony here.

In 1663, after the English Civil War when Charles II and the Stuarts assumed the throne, Charles II granted the old Heath Patent to eight of his supporters. These men became known as the Lords Proprietors. Charles granted this land to repay political debts, to establish settlements overseas and to build political support.

The Carolina Charter of 1663 guaranteed English citizens' rights to the colonists and was the basis for representative government in North Carolina. The Lords Proprietors established three counties along the coast of Carolina in 1664: Albemarle, Clarendon, and Craven.

In 1712 the Proprietors decided that settlements along the Albemarle and Pamlico sounds needed a separate governor from the one at Charles Town, so they divided the colony into North and South Carolina, appointing Edward Hyde governor of North Carolina. Hyde took the oath of office on May 9, 1712. This date marked the official separation of the Carolina colony into North Carolina and South Carolina. Hyde immediately overturned most of Cary's legislation. In his distress, he sailed up the Albemarle Sound and fired on a house occupied by Hyde and his advisors. Cary was immediately captured and returned to England.

### **THE SOUTHERN AND WESTERN FRONTIER**

Settlement in the backcountry by German immigrants and Ulster-Scots, unwilling or unable to live in the coastal settlements, pushed inland. Those who could not find fertile land along the coast found the hills of the Piedmont a willing refuge. Although their hardships were enormous, restless settlers kept coming. These families built cabins, cleared tracts in the wilderness and cultivated crops. They lived on the edge of lands occupied by Natives. Garments were constructed from deer skin or buckskin; the women wore garments of cloth they spun at home. Their food consisted of wild game, collected vegetables and fish.

Settlers were lured to North Carolina from other colonies and countries by reports of fertile soil, inexpensive land, mild climate and uncrowded conditions. Highland Scots were the first large wave of immigrants to move into North Carolina. They came to escape from the crowded conditions and harsh landlords in Scotland. Many new residents came overland to North Carolina via the Great Wagon Road. Scotch-Irish Protestants, Moravians, and Pennsylvania Germans traveled the Great Wagon Road to this backcountry of North Carolina. The settlers farmed, raised livestock, operated grist mills, tanneries, and forges. The Moravian settlers were German Protestants. They were pacifists and developed

communities. They established the towns of Bethabara (1753), Bethania (1759), and Salem (1766). This land was purchased from Lord Granville and named Wachovia.

Many people believe that in 1775 North Carolina became the first colony to declare independence from Great Britain. After the American Revolution, North Carolina became the twelfth state of the Union.

The Cession Act of 1784 and its later repeal were the catalysts, which encouraged people in North Carolina's western area to seek independence. One group led by John Sevier wanted to form a new state. He became governor of the "State of Franklin" in 1785. John Tipton was the leader of the group of people in western North Carolina who wanted to remain in North Carolina. The North Carolina General Assembly set up court districts in the western territory, some people still wanted separation. The Constitutional Confederation Congress refused to recognize the newly created state and it was dissolved. Tennessee became a state in 1796.

The Whiskey Rebellion in 1791 was also a protest of the British excise tax on whiskey made in the colonies. It was easier for westerners to make whiskey from grain than take the grain over terrible roads to market. Whiskey then became a bartering article. The excise tax caused riots and violence in the region. One third of North Carolina's population migrated to other states over the next fifty years.

In 1861, North Carolina seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy in the Civil War. In 1865 North Carolina troops surrendered, and in 1868 the state was re-admitted into the Union.

# Strategy for North Carolina Research

## LAND – LAW – LISTENING – LEANING – LINK – LEARN

### State Repositories

North Carolina Office of Archives and History <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/office-archives-and-history>

Mailing Address: 4610 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4610

State Library of North Carolina <https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/>

Physical Location: 109 E. Jones St., Raleigh, NC Phone: (919) 807-7280 Fax: (919) 733-8807

### State Agency Online Finding Aids

<https://archives.ncdcr.gov/researchers/finding-aids/state-agency-finding-aids>

### Guide to Research Materials in the North Carolina State Archives: County Records

<https://archives.ncdcr.gov/researchers/collections/government-records/county-records-guide>

**Colonial and State Records of North Carolina.** Volume 26 contains the 1790 Census. Select a volume to browse the contents of that volume. Federal census records for North Carolina began in 1790. The 1790 enumeration is missing for Caswell, Granville, and Orange counties.

<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/historical-publications/colonial-records>

Register, Alvaretta K. *State Census of North Carolina, 1784-1787*. North Carolina: State Dept. of Archives and History., 1971, Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1973. Second edition, revised. This publication is the basis for the database on Ancestry.

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3005/>

Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC – [www.moravianarchives.org/](http://www.moravianarchives.org/)

Moravian Music Foundation – [www.moravianmusic.org/](http://www.moravianmusic.org/)

Bethlehem Digital History Project – [www.bdhp.moravian.edu](http://www.bdhp.moravian.edu)

North Carolina Online Records -

[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/North\\_Carolina\\_Online\\_Genealogy\\_Records](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/North_Carolina_Online_Genealogy_Records)

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