



"A Plan of the Town & Harbour of Charles-Town," inset in map by Edward Crisp, *A Compleat Description of the Province of Carolina . . . , ca. 1711*

CHARLES TOWN

Descriptions of Eighteenth-Century CHARLES TOWN before the Revolution

*from an English explorer in 1700, a South Carolina resident in 1742,
a German clergyman in 1750, a Philadelphia merchant in 1765,
and a British ship captain in 1769.*

◆ “enjoy at this Day an entire Liberty of their Worship.” 1700.

John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina* [1700-1709], 1709, excerpts.

John Lawson, an English naturalist and explorer, describes his first impressions of Charles Town and the colony of Carolina, where he would spend eight years studying the plants, animals, and peoples of the region.

After a Fortnight’s Stay here [New York City], we put out from *Sandyhook*, and in 14 Days after arriv’d at *Charles-Town*, the Metropolis of *South Carolina*, which is situated in 32 [degrees] 45 [minutes] *North* Latitude, and admits of large Ships to come over their Bar up to the Town, where is a very commodious Harbour, about 5 Miles distant from the Inlet, and stands on a Point very convenient for Trade, being seated between two pleasant and navigable Rivers.

The Town has very regular and fair Streets, in which are good Buildings of Brick and Wood, and since my coming thence, has had great Additions of beautiful, large Brick-buildings, besides a strong Fort, and regular Fortifications made to defend the Town. The Inhabitants, by their wise Management and Industry, have much improv’d the Country [colony], which is in as thriving Circumstances at this Time as any Colony on the Continent of *English America*, and is of more Advantage to the Crown of *Great Britain* than any of the other more *Northerly* Plantations (*Virginia* and *Maryland* excepted).

This Colony was at first planted by a genteel Sort of People that were well acquainted with Trade, and had either Money or Parts to make good Use of the Advantages that offer’d, as most of them have done by raising themselves to great Estates and considerable Places of Trust and Posts of Honour, in this thriving Settlement. Since the first Planters, abundance of *French* and others have gone over and rais’d themselves to considerable Fortunes. They are very neat and exact in Packing and Shipping of their Commodities, which Method has got them so great a Character [reputation] Abroad that they generally come to a good Market with their Commodities; when oftentimes the Product of other Plantations are forc’d to be sold at lower Prices. They have a considerable Trade both to *Europe* and the *West Indies*, whereby they become rich and are supply’d with all Things necessary for Trade and genteel Living, which several other Places fall short of. . . .

Their Roads, with great Industry, are made very good and pleasant. Near the Town is built a fair Parsonage-house with necessary Offices, and the Minister has a very considerable Allowance from his Parish. There is likewise a *French* Church in Town of the Reform’d Religion [French Protestants] and several Meeting-houses for dissenting Congregations who all enjoy at this Day an entire Liberty of their Worship, the Constitution of this Government allowing all Parties of well-meaning Christians to enjoy a free Toleration and possess the same Privileges, so long as they appear to behave themselves peaceably and well — It being the Lords Proprietors’ Intent that the Inhabitants of *Carolina* should be as free from Oppression as any in the Universe, which doubtless they will if their own Differences amongst themselves do not occasion the contrary.

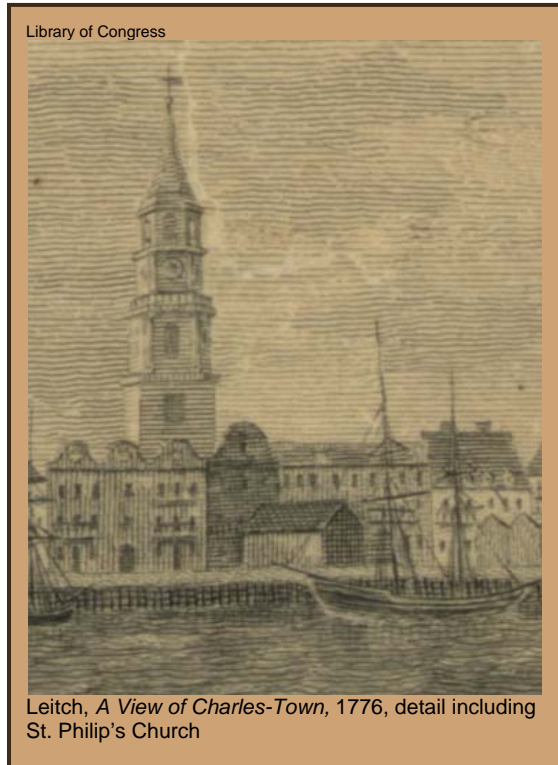


◆ “Charles Town, the Metropolis, is a neat pretty place.” 1742.

Eliza Lucas [Pinckney], Letter to her brother, Thomas Lucas, 22 May 1742, excerpts.¹

Born in the West Indies where her father, a British army officer, was based, Eliza Lucas was educated in England and moved with her family to South Carolina in 1738 when she was fifteen. Her younger brothers lived in London, England.

I am now set down, my Dear brother, to obey your commands and give you a short description of the part of the world I now inhabit. South Carolina then is a large and Extensive Country [colony] Near the



Sea. Most of the settled parts of it is upon a flat — the soil near Charles Town sandy, but further distant clay and swamplands. It abounds with fine navigable rivers and great quantities of fine timber. . . .

The people in general [are] hospitable and honest, and the better sort add to these a polite genteel behaviour. The poorer sort are the most indolent people in the world or they could never be wretched in so plentiful a country as this. The winters here are very fine and pleasant, but 4 months in the year is extremely disagreeable, excessive hot, much thunder and lightning, and muskatoes [mosquitoes] and sand flies in abundance.

Charles Town, the Metropolis, is a neat pretty place. The inhabitants [are] polite and live in a very genteel manner; the streets and houses regularly built; the ladies and gentlemen gay in their dress. Upon the whole you will find as many agreeable people of both sexes for the size of the places as almost any where. St. Philip's Church in Charles Town is a very Elegant one and much frequented. There are several more places of public worship in this town and the generality of people [are] of a religious turn of mind.

◆ “The splendor, lust, and opulence there has grown almost to the limit.” 1750.

Rev. Johann Martin Bolzius, *Reliable Answer to Some Submitted Questions Concerning the Land Carolina . . .*, 1750, excerpt.

Bolzius was a leader of the German Lutheran settlement of Ebenezer, Georgia, founded in 1734. In 1750 he published a pamphlet in a Q&A format to inform other Germans of the promise and realities of emigrating to Georgia or Carolina.

37th Question. How much will a genteel family need per year for its upkeep in Charlestown, if it consists of 9 persons including servant girls and one butler, and which is more than well supplied with linen and all necessary housewares, and whether it is possibly believed that 5 to 600 Rthlr. [Rheinthalers] of German money could provide this support is an agreeable way. It does not require carriage and horses, if only it can otherwise live quietly and agreeably.

Answer. It is expensive and costly to live in Charlestown and much more than 600 Rthlr. or £100 would be required yearly for the upkeep of such a family according to its position even without carriage and horses. The splendor, lust, and opulence there has grown almost to the limit. If the family did not go along with it, it would be despised. Young people there are in great danger. I am sorry that I have to write this. In

¹ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney (University of North Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 39-40. Permission pending.

Ebenezer [Georgia] it is comparatively cheap to live, and I could not manage my sparsely appointed household with £50 if I did not at times receive some help from European benefactors and if my wife did not keep several cattle. How much less can such a family manage? Its European clothes it would have to change according to the often changing Charlestown fashion. Otherwise there would be much humiliation and mockery. House rent is excessively dear [costly] in Charlestown.

◆ “’tis a flourishing place, capable of vast improvement.” 1765.

Pelataiah Webster, Journal of a voyage from Philadelphia to Charles Town, May-June 1765, excerpts.²

A Philadelphia merchant, Pelataiah Webster kept a daily journal of his two-month business trip to Charles Town.

May 27. Spent in viewing the town. It contains about 1000 houses, with inhabitants, 5000 whites and 20,000 blacks; has 8 houses for religious worship, viz. [namely] St. Philip’s & St. Michael’s, Ctch. [Church] of England, large stone buildings with porticos with large pillars and steeples. St. Michael’s has a good ring of bells. 1 Scotch Presbyterian Ctch.; 1 Independent, called the New England Meeting; 1 Dutch Ctch., and two Baptist meetings, & one French Ctch.: these 3 last very small.

The State-House is a heavy building of about 120 by 40 feet. The Council Chamber is about 40 feet square, decorated with many heavy pillars & much carving, rather superb than elegant. The assembly room is of the same dimensions, but much plainer work, ’tis convenient enough.

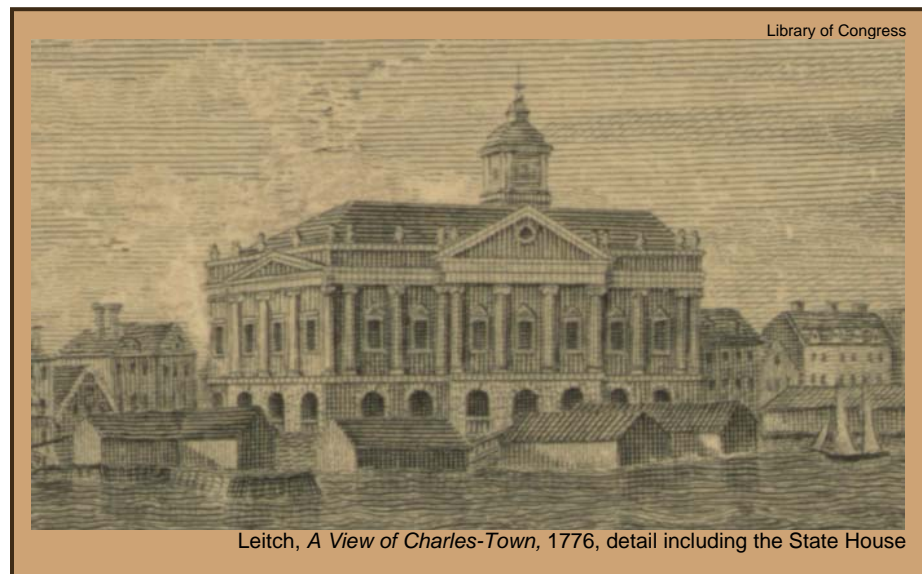
The streets of this city run N. & S., and E. & W., intersecting each other at right angles. They are not paved except the footways within the posts about 6 feet wide, which are paved with brick in the principal streets.

There are large fortifications here but mostly unfinished and ruinous. There is a pretty fort on James Island called Johnson’s fort³ which commands the entrance of the harbour . . .

The laborious business is here chiefly done by black slaves of which there are great multitudes. The climate is very warm; the chief produce is rice & indigo; the manufacture of hemp is set afoot & likely to succeed very well. They have considerable lumber and naval stores [tar, pitch, and turpentine]. They export annually 100,000 barrels of rice & 60,000 lbs. indigo, . . .

The[y] have no considerable seminaries of learning [colleges], but many youth of quality go to London for an education. The people are vastly affable and polite, quite free from pride, & a stranger may make himself very easy with them. . . .

There is a pretty well chosen



² T. P. Harrison, ed., “Journal of a Voyage to Charlestown in So. Carolina by Pelataiah Webster in 1765,” *Publications of the Southern History Association* 2:1 (January 1898), pp. 131-148.

³ See map inset, p. 1.

library in town purchased by private subscriptions of a number of gentlemen, by the name of the Charlestown Library Society. . . .

Wednesday 29 [May 1765]. Still sauntering about town as much as the great heats will permit. Dinner with Mr. Tho[mas]. Smith, a reputable merchant in this town & in very fine business: is an agreeable sensible kind man: passed my time with him very pleasantly several hours.

Thursd. 30. Dined this day with Mr. John Poaug, a Scotch merchant in this City, a very genteel polite man. . . .

Monday, 3 [June 1765]. Dined this day with Mr. Thomas Liston, a reputable merchant born here: is a man of great openness & politeness, of generous sentiments & a very genteel behaviour: passed the afternoon very agreeably in his summer house with him & Mr. Lindo, a noted Jew, inspector of Indigo here.

Tuesd. 4. The militia all appeared under arms, about 800, & the guns at all the forts were fired, it being the King's Birthday. The artillery made a good appearance and performed their exercises and firings very well. The militia were not so well trained & exercised but made a pretty good & handsome appearance. N. B. [*nota bene*; note well] The militia & artillery of Charlestown are said to consist of 1300 men in the whole list from 16 to 60 years old. . . .

Saturday 8. Very hot. Met with disappointment in the sale of my flour which lies on my hands & I fear I must leave it unsold or expose it to vendue [auction] with loss of what I have procured with long pains & industry: my mind is somewhat depressed.

Dined with Mr. Liston, passed the afternoon agreeably at his summer house till 5 o'clock P. M. then went up into the steeple of St. Michael's, the highest in town & which commands a fine prospect of the town, harbour, river, forts, sea, &c. . . .

Tuesday 11. Sold 12 BBl. flour at £4 [four English pounds] currency pr. ct. which is about first cost to Mr. Peter Boquet & the rest. Mr. Liston procured me a sale of at 90/ pr. ct. So I am over the difficulties of my sales. Dined with Mr. Liston, Capt. Bains from London & Mr. Head. Passed the evening at the Reverend Rob[er]t Smith's.

Wednesday 12. Spent most of this day in settling my little accounts [business], exchanging my monies into dollars. The season is gay but the air sultry, yet cooled by frequent squalls of wind & rain. Passed some hours in Mr. Liston's summer house and the evening with Mr. Glen.

Thursd. 13.

See an alligator of which there are many in the rivers & bays in this country. They are made much like



Philip Georg Friedrich von Reck, "Alligator, a sort of crocodile," Georgia, 1736

what is called swift in N[ew] England. This I see was about 3 feet long & three inches diameter in the body: his skin was scaly much like a snake, his mouth very large and cavernous, his teeth irregular, long, partaking partly of those of fish & partly of those of a dog. Some of these amphibious animals here are surprisingly large & 15 or 18 feet long. . . .

Friday 14 [June 1765]. A hot sultry day. Went with Mr. Liston in a boat to Sullivan's Island where there were 2[00] or 300 Negroes performing quarantine with the small pox. This island is 7 miles E.

Leitch, *A View of Charles-Town, 1776*, detail

from the town, about 4 miles long, very sandy, hot, and barren, though there are some groves of trees in it. There is a pest-house⁴ here with pretty good conveniences. The most moving sight was a poor white man performing quarantine alone in a boat, at anchor ten rods from shore, with an awning & pretty poor accommodations. . . .

Sat. June 15. Warm & sultry. Dined with Mr. Liston, & passed the forenoon at the library. Passed some hours this afternoon with some Guinea captains,⁵ who are a rough set of people, but somewhat carressed by the merchants on account of the great profits of their commissions. Spent the evening in walking and smoked a pipe at Mr. Glen's.

Sund. 16. A. M. attended Divine service at the Scotch Presbyterian meeting. Rev'd. Mr. Hewett preached. Dined with Mr. Glen & sundry [various] other gentlemen, viz. [namely] Mr. Miche, McCauly, merchants, &c. P. M. Attended Divine service at the New England Independent meeting. . . Had a fine walk with Mr. Carpenter, a gentleman from Jamaica just arrived, & afterwards spent the evening very agreeably with Mr. Glen. . . .

Tuesday 18. . . . embarked on board the brigantine *Prince of Wales*, Thomas Mason, Commander, for Philadelphia; took leave of all my Charlestown friends. At 4 P. M. made sail: at 7 anchored off the fort, not being to get over the [sand] bar. I have Mrs. Phanny Johnson an infant of 5 years old in my care for the voyage. She is a fatherless child & bound to Philadelphia in her way to Quebec to her grandfather, the Rev'd. Mr. Brooks, who has sent for her.

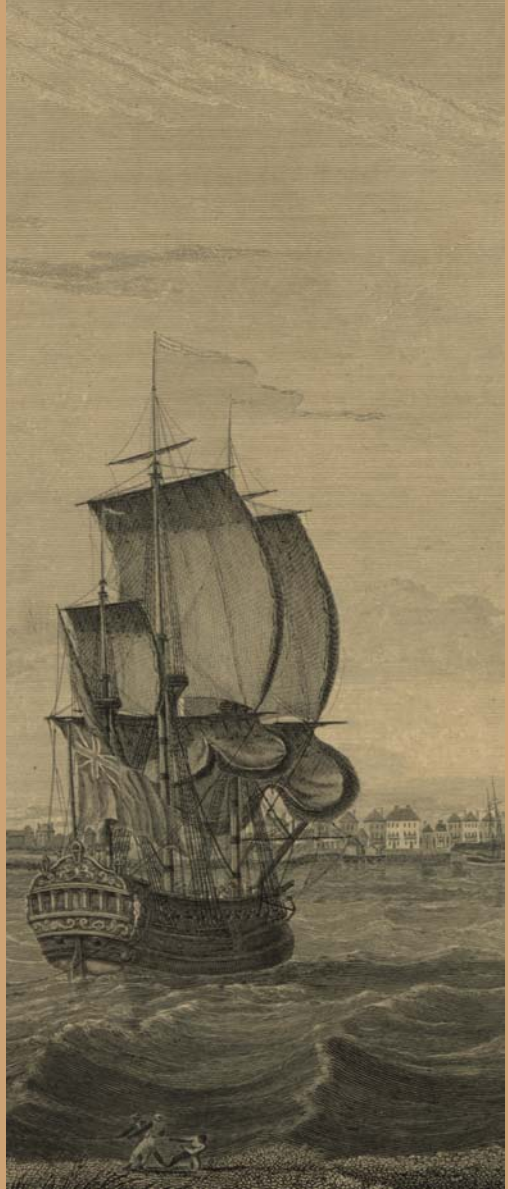
Now I have left Charlestown, an agreeable & polite place in which I was used [treated] very genteely & contracted much acquaintance for the time I stayed here. The heats are much too severe, the water bad, the soil sandy, the timber too much evergreen; but with all these disadvantages, 'tis a flourishing place, capable of vast improvement: will have, I fear, some uncomfortable bands of banditti on its frontiers soon, its distance from proper authority having already drawn there great numbers of very idle dissolute people who begin to be very troublesome.

Weds-day 19th [June 1765]. At 4 A. M. weighed anchor & made sail. The wind headed us and we turned it over the Bar at 12, wind at N. E.: steered E. S. E. 'till we gained a good offing, then tacked & steered N. 'till we were at night abreast Bull's Island, then tacked again & stood off from the land.

[Webster's ship arrived in Philadelphia June 25.]

⁴ building or hospital for people with infectious diseases.

⁵ slave ship captains (referring to Guinea, i.e., the west coast of Africa).



Leitch, *A View of Charles-Town, 1776*, detail

◆ “This is Charles-town, how do you like it.” 1769.

Poem by the captain of a British warship, 1769.

Black and white all mix'd together,
Inconstant, strange, unhealthful weather
Burning heat and chilling cold
Dangerous both to young and old
Boisterous winds and heavy rains
Fevers and rheumatic pains
Agues plenty without doubt
Sores, boils, the prickling heat and gout
Musquitos on the skin make blotches
Centipedes and large cock-roaches
Frightful creatures in the waters
Porpoises, sharks and alligators
Houses built on barren land
No lamps or lights, but streets of sand
Pleasant walks, if you can find 'em
Scandalous tongues, if any mind 'em
The markets dear and little money
Large potatoes, sweet as honey
Water bad, past all drinking
Men and women without thinking
Every thing at a high price
But rum, hominy and rice
Many a widow not unwilling
Many a beau not worth a shilling
Many a bargain, if you strike it,
This is Charles-town, how do you like it.

By Capt. Martin, captain of a Man of War.