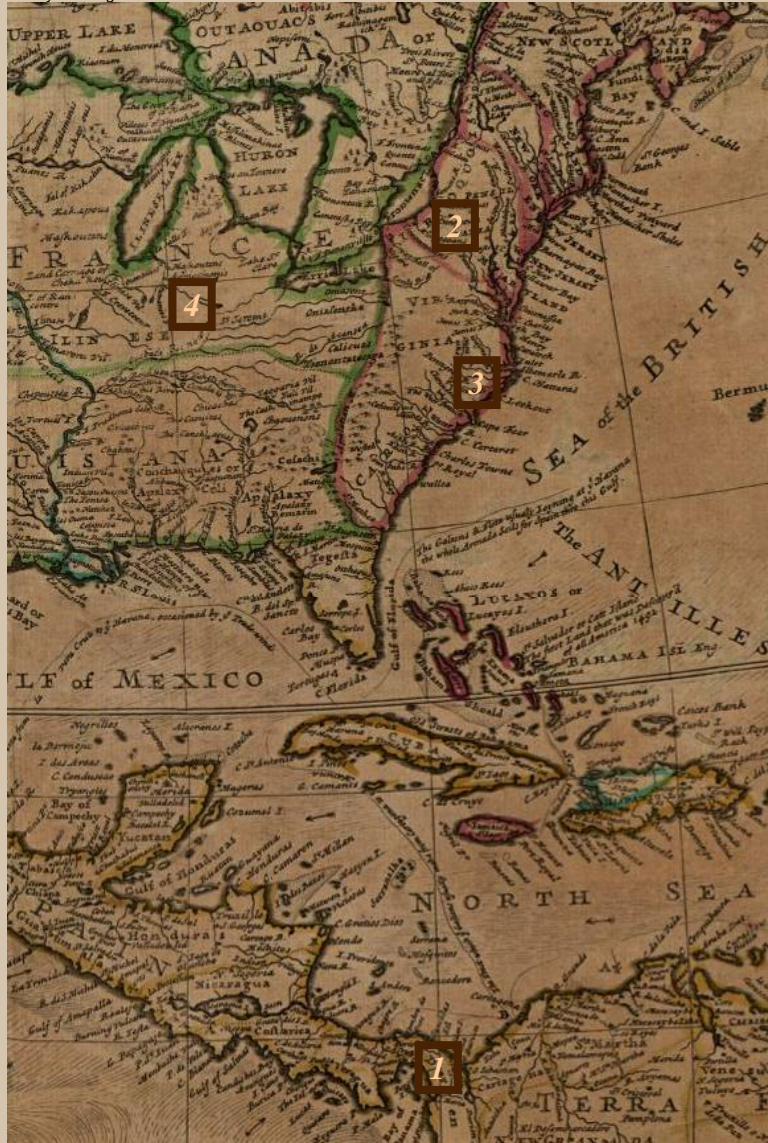




Library of Congress



Herman Moll, *This Map of North America*, 1715 (detail)

1. **NEW CALEDONIA**, Isthmus of Panama  
 Founded 1698, abandoned 1699.
2. **PROPOSED SWISS COLONY**, Pennsylvania  
 Proposed 1704-1708, never founded.
3. **NEW BERN**, North Carolina  
 Founded 1710, abandoned by 1718; re-settled in late 1720s.
4. **NEW WALES**, Ohio River Valley  
 Proposed 1763, never founded.

*“the unhappy account  
of our misfortune”*

# FAILED COLONIES

North & Central America  
 1698-1763

Why did colonies succeed or fail? Understanding the successes requires studying the failed and never-founded colonies as well: two of each are presented here. Consider these questions as you read the primary documents.

- What initiative is required?
- Who gets the project going?
- Where does the money come from, and where does it go?
- Who signs up to go?
- How do they get organized?
- If permission is required, who gets it and how?
- How does the colony's leadership change from proposal to settlement to survival?
- If the colony fails, where do the settlers go? What do they do?
- If the colony fails, who does the explaining?
- If the colony fails, do the leaders and settlers try again?

While studying these failed colonies of the 1700s, compare them with other settlements in “frontier” areas, such as Jamestown and other early European towns in America,<sup>1</sup> the Indian removals to present-day Oklahoma in the 1830s and '40s, and the first Mormon settlements in Utah in the 1840s.

<sup>1</sup> See sections “Hardships,” “Failed Colonies,” and “Go Ahead?” in American Beginnings (NHC) at [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/index.htm](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/index.htm).

## NEW CALEDONIA

### Isthmus of Panama, 1698-1699<sup>2</sup>

In 1698 the colony of New Caledonia was founded on the isthmus of Panama by the Scottish government as a last-ditch effort to revive its economy from crippling competition with England. Less than six months after the first settlers arrived, it was abandoned after a season of dissension, disease, Indian attacks, and the looming threat of a Spanish attack. Back in England, the colony's founder, William Paterson, presented his assessment of the colony's failure, which some deem a factor in Scotland's long-resisted union with England in 1707 (creating Great Britain). At this point in the report, the fleet of five ships with 1200 men, including 60 officers, has completed the transatlantic journey from Scotland and has landed at its destination in Central America.

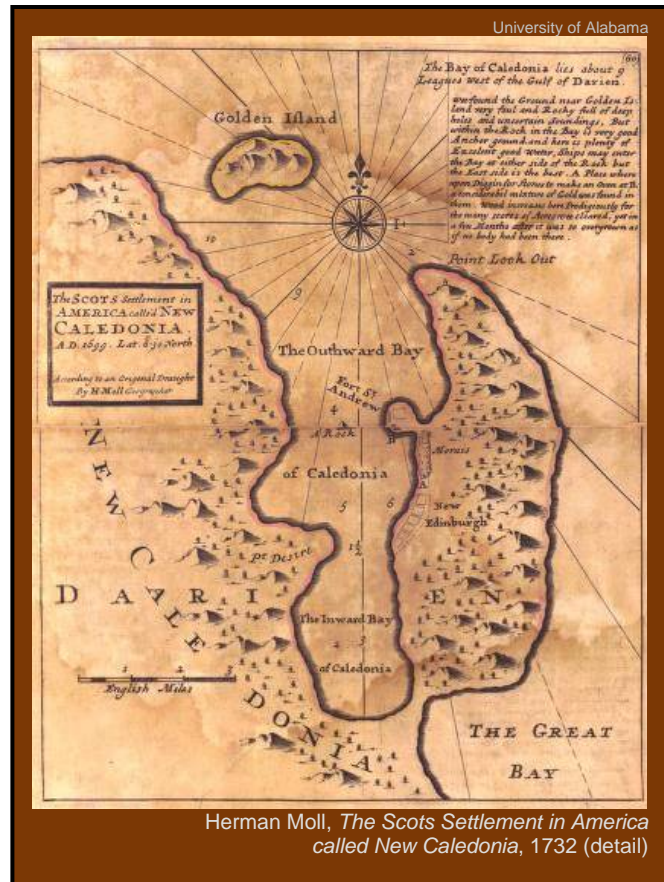
The first thing fallen upon was a place of landing; but the sea counselors were for a mere morass, neither fit to be fortified nor planted, nor indeed for the men to lie upon. But this was carried by main force and a great struggle, although I know no reason they had for it, unless it might be to save one of their boats the trouble, once in two or three days, to bestow three or four hours to supply the landmen with water.

We were upon clearing and making huts upon this improper place near two months, in which time experience — the schoolmaster of fools — convinced our masters that the point now called Fort Saint Andrew was more proper for us; upon which they appointed Captain Drummond to oversee the work, who, according to the tools he had to work with, did beyond what could be reasonably expected from him; for our men, though for the most part in health, were generally weak for want of sufficient allowance of provisions and liquors, and this inconveniency upon them was the harder by reason of the irregular serving of their scrimp allowances, for our marine masters continually pretended other urgent business and so could hardly spare their boats to bring the land provisions and conveniences ashore, and many of the most needful things that I know were only designed for the shore, were detained on board under pretense they belonged to the ships. . . .

Before this time Major Cunningham, one of our number, was become so uneasy, and possessed (as we thought) by so unaccountable conceits and notions, that he gave us no small trouble, and at last would need forsake not only his post but also the Colony. This very justly offended the rest of the counselors, considering their raw and unsettled circumstances, and some thoughts there were of detaining him by force. But after weighing his temper, they consented to his going, but thought it were prudent to part with him in friendship than otherways, least any that might espouse his humor in Scotland should prove a means of retarding or frustrating our needful supplies. . . .

As the native Indians, at our first coming, had made us several advantageous offers to undertake against the Spaniards, so now, in this month of February, they continued to alarm us with the preparations of the Spaniards and to press us from several parts to an undertaking against them. Among these were Corbet of the Samblas, Diego of the Gulph, and Pausigo of Carreto, with others. But we still answered them that our King was at peace with the Spaniards, and so we could not make war unless they began with us, but whenever they did we would repel force by force, and assemble all the Indians and others that were willing to assist us against them. They expressed a wonderful hatred and horror for the Spaniards,

<sup>2</sup> William Paterson, *Report of Matters Relating to the Colony of Caledonia*, 1699, excerpts.



Herman Moll, *The Scots Settlement in America called New Caledonia*, 1732 (detail)

and seemed not to understand how we could be at peace with them, except we were as bad as they. It is certain this was the true season of the year for undertakings of that kind, and our people were then in health, and indifferent strong, which they happened not to be afterwards when the Spaniards had given us sufficient provocation, and when the season was not so proper. . . .

. . . Although considering our low and distressed condition for want of supplies, the prohibiting the King's English subjects from trading, or so much as corresponding with us, was very discouraging, yet the declaring we had broken the peace, and, by consequence, proclaiming us pirates, before we had been once heard or summoned to answer, so very contrary to the usual proceeding even in case of real piracy, was most of all surprising, and became the general occasion of people's concluding that the long silence of our country proceeded from no other cause but that they were brow-beaten out of it, and did not so much as send word to us to shift ourselves.

Upon these and the like apprehensions every one more than others began to be in haste to be gone. When I saw there was no talking against our leaving the place, I persuaded them what I could, that first rumors of things of this nature were always most terrifying, and that happily our native country knew nothing of all this; and if they did not, but remained firm to the design, there was none of us but would afterward be ashamed of our precipitant forwardness in going away upon this occasion; therefore I desired them not to design [plan] or so much as talk of going away; but, only since our landmen were so ill, that they were no more in condition to defend the fort, that they might embark some or all of the best things on board the several ships, as places of greater security, and if we must leave the harbor, nay, the coast, that we should think of it only by precaution, and even return when we should be at sea, if we met with any news or supplies from Scotland, which I did not doubt of our meeting with, if we did not make too much haste. This they seemed to agree to, but not by any means to lose time in going out; but, although they had agreed the contrary, yet it was immediately among the people and strangers with us that we had resolved to desert the place.

***“When I saw there was no talking against our leaving the place, I persuaded them what I could”***

From that time, all I could pretend to was only to contrive lets [hindrances] and stumbling blocks to the proceedings. Another thing I thought upon was, if our sloop arrived from Jamaica, to stay with twenty-five or thirty men upon the coast and live upon turtling and fishing for some time, till we should see if any recruits or news came from Scotland. This I imparted to Captain Thomas Drummond, who seemed most concerned at our leaving the place. He seemed very well pleased with the proposal, if it could be reduced to practice, with only this difference, that I should go for Scotland in order to represent some things of moment to the company, and he stay in my place upon the coast; but our sloop not coming from Jamaica before our going away, as also the almost universal falling down of our men, and wanting means to recover them, rendered this design of staying upon the coast impracticable. . . .

When we were come to New York we were much concerned to find so universal an



inclination in all sorts of people, who seemed to regret our leaving the place more than we; and by our friends we then understood that some sloops and vessels were gone to Caledonia, and a great many more, notwithstanding all prohibitions, were following after, if the unhappy account of our misfortunate leaving the place had not stopped them.

In our voyage from the colony to New York we lost near 150 of about 250 persons put on board, most of them for want of looking after and means to recover them, in which condition we had no small loss and inconveniency by the sickness and death of Mr. Hector Mackenzie, our chief surgeon, who died off the Cape St. Antonio, July the 12<sup>th</sup>, of a distemper wholly or in a great measure contracted by his unwearied pains and industry among the people on shore, as well as on board, for many weeks together, when there was hardly any other willing, if able, or at least capable of helping them.

## ■ PROPOSED SWISS COLONY, Pennsylvania, 1704-1708<sup>3</sup>

In 1702, a Swiss nobleman and geologist named Francis Louis Michel visited Manakin Town in Virginia, a refugee settlement for French Huguenots. Encouraged by the prospects for a similar Swiss colony in America (in Pennsylvania or Virginia, he hoped), Michel began assembling plans and supporters. In his writings he conveys enthusiasm as well as understanding of why colonies fail.

*Francis Louis Michel, letter to Rudolf Ochs, a friend in London, May 20<sup>th</sup> 1704, excerpt* \_\_\_\_\_

. . . How praiseworthy and easy would it be to send out a colony like other nations, which would be a greater glory and praise for our country than to send large number, for the sake of money, to slaughter in battle. We think that it is an honor. Other nations, however, speak of it differently. What else can be the intention of Hollanders, Swedes, Finns, Germans, and other nations, which send people to this country than to make use of such places in case of necessity. I have already had opportunity to remark sufficiently how willingly the English government would consent to this. Who has more reason to look for expansion and places of retreat than our country? I cannot think otherwise than that the government acts culpably in not assisting in this matter with word and deed the many empty hands and hungry mouths. It would be easy to present a memorial [petition] to the English crown, the answer would soon show whether it is feasible or not. It is a great pity that such a large country, suitable for all kinds of fruits, remains unsettled. But it is necessary that people should not be deceived by some who came to this country, not knowing why they came and who had empty and lazy hands. Such people are an injury and obstacle to many others. But how do those get along, of whom a considerable number are to be found here, who not only bring nothing into the country, but are even bound out for a certain time to serve, and yet in a few years acquire more than would be possible to do in the best countries?

***“Such people are an injury and obstacle to many others.”***

*Report of Michel to George Ritter, Bern, Switzerland, 15-25 December 1708 (extant summary, excerpts).*

In response to Michel's initiative, Ritter submitted petitions to the town government of Bern and the Queen of England requesting approval and support for a Swiss colony in America, but bureaucratic and financial obstacles hindered progress. Writing from America, Michel urged immediate action on the plan, explicitly listing what should *not* be done that would further delay their plans.

. . . [Michel] urges that the business of the colony be conducted with zeal now, when the most favorable moment has come and many members of the government and of Parliament are at Court, during the winter season. He makes the suggestion that the articles of agreement, formerly drawn up, be not presented, but that qualified commissioners be sent and that full authority be give them to carry on the negotiations [i.e., with English and colonial officials] personally and to remove every obstacle as may be found necessary, for plans may be sent from a distance, but they cannot be carried out at a distance as well as near at hand.

***“plans may be sent from a distance, but they cannot be carried out at a distance as well as near at hand”***

<sup>3</sup> William J. Hinke, ed., trans., “Letters Regarding the Second Journey of Michel to America, February 14, 1703, to January 16, 1704, and His Stay in America till 1708,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 24:1 (January 1916): 289-301.

## ■ NEW BERN, North Carolina, 1710-1714<sup>4</sup>

His first plan for a colony coming to naught, Francis Louis Michel inspired a fellow Swiss nobleman, Christoph von Graffenried, to join with him in founding a settlement in North Carolina for Swiss and German refugees (and near potentially lucrative silver mines). The first years brought only hardship to the settlers from crop failures, disease, and Indians wars, and, despite von Graffenried's attempts to save the colony, he finally sold out his share and returned to England. In his *Relation of My American Project* (ca. 1716), he outlined the "misfortunes" that doomed the colony. Most of the settlers abandoned the settlement by 1718, which was not resettled until the late 1720s.

To provide for and send this colony I took indescribable pains.

1. I tried to choose for this project healthy, industrious people and among them those of all sorts of trades necessary for this undertaking.
2. A supply of all kinds of necessary tools and things.
3. As also sufficient and good food.
4. Good ships and sailors, also certain over-and under-directors for this people, to keep every thing in good order.
5. In order that no negligence or lack of knowledge should be attributed to us, I have begun nothing without the knowledge, advice, and instruction of the royal committee.
6. Upon the ships, as afterwards upon the land, the over-directors were three of the most prominent persons from Carolina itself, who had already lived there many years and were acquainted with everything in those parts. These were the Chief Judge or Justice of the Peace, the Chief or General Surveyor, and the Receiver General, who were on business in London at this very time and were appointed by the royal committee, as well as by the Lords Proprietors, to have a close, faithful, and good watch over these people. The under-directors were composed of more than twelve of the most orderly and honorable men among the people—according to appearances. . . .

*“The misery and wretchedness were almost indescribable”*

. . . [The first ship's departure from England] took place in the winter — in January — and then, because of the rough winds and storms, this ship was so driven about that it did not arrive in Virginia until after thirteen weeks. This, along with the salt food to which the people were not accustomed, and the fact that they were so closely confined, contributed very much to the sickness and death of many upon the sea. Others could not restrain their desires when they came to land, drank too much fresh water and over-loaded themselves with raw fruit, so that they died of fever, and this colony therefore had half died off before it was well settled. The one ship which was filled with the best goods and on which those in best circumstances were traveling, had the misfortune, at the mouth of the James River, in sight of an English man-of-war, which however lay at anchor, to be attacked by a bold French privateer and plundered. This is the first misfortune.

After the surviving colony had regained health in Virginia where they were received very kindly, they betook themselves about twenty English miles towards Carolina, all of which, along with the goods cost a great deal. And now when they came into the county of Albemarle to the home of one Colonel Pollock upon the river called Chowan, a member of the council and one of the wealthiest in North Carolina, he provided these people (but for money or the worth of it) with ships, so that they were conducted through the Sound into the County of Bath upon the River Neuse, with provision for only the most urgent necessity; and there the Surveyor General settled them on a point of land between the Neuse and the Trent River. This place called Chattoka is where the city of New Bern was afterwards founded.

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<sup>4</sup> Christoph von Graffenried's *Account of the Founding of New Bern*, written ca. 1716, publ. 1920, eds. Vincent Todd & Julius Gobel, published for the North Carolina Historical Commission by the University of Illinois Press, 1920; permission pending. Full text online from the N.C. Division of Archives and History at [www.ncpublications.com/Colonial/Bookshelf/Graff/degrafpref.htm](http://www.ncpublications.com/Colonial/Bookshelf/Graff/degrafpref.htm).

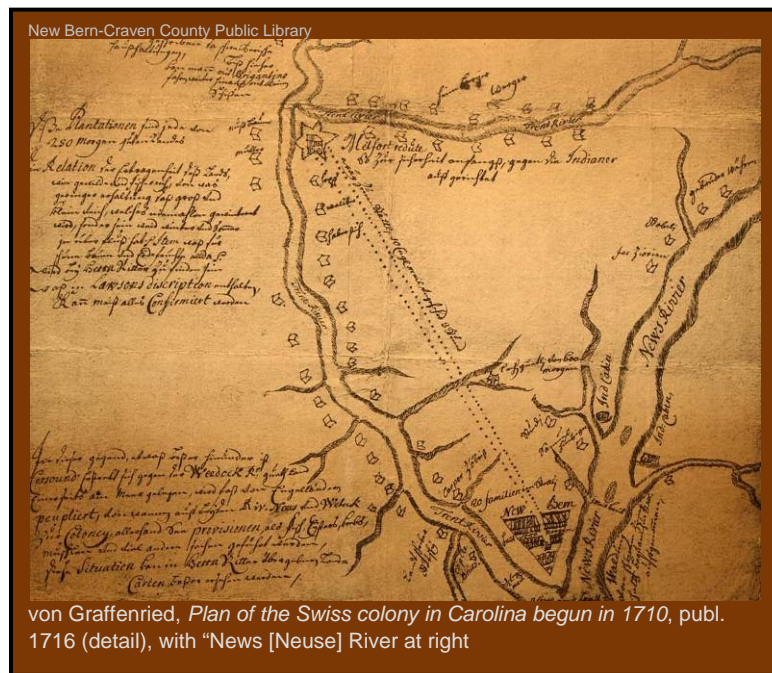
Here begins the second fatality or misfortune. This surveyor general L\_\_\_\_\_ by name, who should have located the people immediately upon their allotted land and the plantations assigned to them, claimed that, in order to save time to enable them to clear their land, he had placed them on the south side of this point of land along the Trent River, in the very hottest and most unhealthy portion, instead of toward the north, on the Neuse River, where they could have been better placed and in a more healthy locality. But he did it for his own advantage, because this was his own land, in order that it might be cleared by these people for his benefit. But since he sold that same land and ours — and dear enough — yes wrongfully (for he had no right to it), and moreover, since it was inhabited by Indians (although he sold it to us for unencumbered land) the poor people had to live in great distress until fall, when I came. From lack of sufficient provisions they were soon compelled to give their clothes and whatever they possessed to the neighboring settlers for food. The misery and wretchedness were almost indescribable, for, on my arrival,<sup>5</sup> I saw that almost all were sick, yes, even in extremity, and the well were all very feeble. In what a labyrinth and danger I then found myself, even my life not safe, the good Lord knows.

Consider how my Bern people, who in every other respect had had a favorable passage with me in a good and favorable time of year, with plenty of room, and not one sick on the way, looked on this tragedy, where sickness, despair, and lack of the most necessary things reigned supreme. . . .

What caused the Indian war was firstly, the slanders and instigations of certain plotters against Governor Hyde, and secondly, against me, in that they

***“In short, everything was carelessly managed.”***

talked the Indians into believing that I had come to take their land, and that then the Indians would have to go back towards the mountains. I talked them out of this and it was proven by the friendliness I had shown them, as also by the payment for the land where I settled at the beginning (namely that upon which the little city of New Bern was begun), regardless of the fact that the seller was to have given it over to me free. I had also made peace with the same Indian inhabitants so that they were entirely satisfied with me. Thirdly, it was the great carelessness of the colony. Fourthly, the harsh treatment of certain surly and rough English inhabitants who deceived them in trade, would not let them hunt about their plantations, and under this excuse took away from them their arms, munitions, pelts or hides, yes, even beat an Indian to death. This alarmed them very much and with reason. . . .



von Graffenried, *Plan of the Swiss colony in Carolina begun in 1710*, publ. 1716 (detail), with "Neuse" River at right

The carelessness of the Carolinians contributed not a little to the audacity and bold actions of these Indians, because they trusted them too much, and for safety there was not a fortified place in the whole province to which one could retire; also in case of any eruption or hostility no arrangements were made and much less were there the necessary provisions of food and war supplies. This was carried so far that in these times of unrest, whole shiploads of corn and meat were carried away and exchanged for sugar, molasses, brandy, and other less necessary things. In short, everything was carelessly managed. Instead of drawing together into one or two bodies of well ordered soldiery in

<sup>5</sup> Von Graffenried arrived with the second ship of refugees from Berne, Switzerland.

order to drive the enemy from the boundaries of the settlements, every one wanted to save his own house and defend himself. This was the cause that finally the Indians or savages

overpowered one plantation after another, and soon brought the whole province under them. My idea was that in case the savages would not act in accordance with the agreement made with them, and could not be brought to a good treaty, to divert them with the peace I had made, to procure a truce, and meanwhile, with the help of my people to establish myself in some place and, provided with all necessary munitions and food, by this means to make a greater and more vigorous resistance, or else entirely to destroy the savages. But there was nothing to be done with these wrong-headed Carolinians, who, even if some were more courageous than the others, took the matter up so heedlessly and clumsily, got around behind the Indians who were much stronger in numbers, good shots, and well provided with everything, so that this small handful of Christians immediately had to get the worst of it. Yes, without the help of the Palatines and Switzers they would have been destroyed . . .

***“But there was nothing to be done with these wrong-headed Carolinians”***

## ■ NEW WALES, proposed colony, Ohio River Valley, 1763<sup>6</sup>

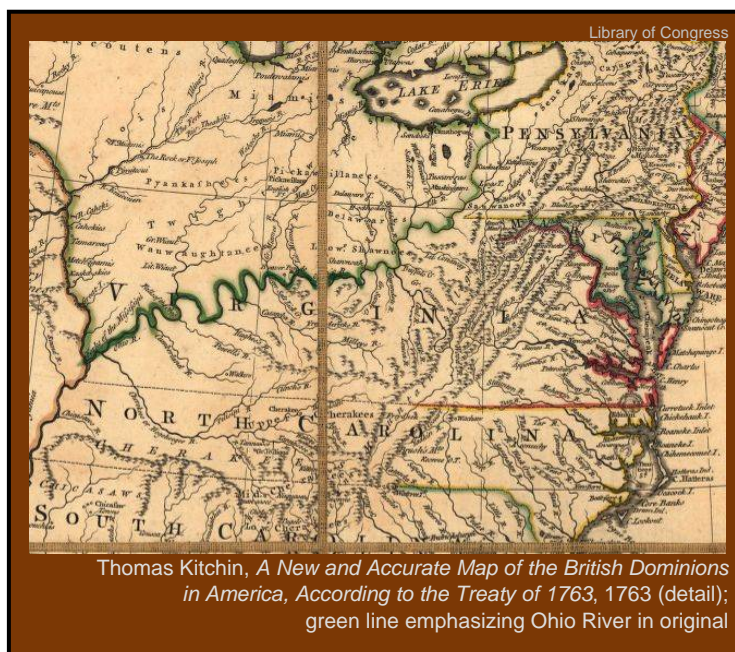
With the British victory in the French and Indian War in 1763, and its acquisition of all French territory in North America, many proposals were devised for new settlements in the Ohio River valley, only to be abandoned for lack of planning, funds, and follow-through. One such plan, devised by British army officer and a group of New York investors, envisioned a “very Extensive Colony upon the finest Part of the Ohio” to be named New Wales. They published this advertisement in numerous colonial papers encouraging interested persons “to embrace this Opportunity.” The colony was never established, its conception faulted by Benjamin Franklin as “made without Authority, and by weak Heads, and is accordingly come to nothing.”<sup>7</sup>

*The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 21 April 1763

**W**HEREAS a Proposal is now on Foot for settling a very Extensive Colony upon the finest Part of the OHIO, and Application been also made previous to the Peace for that Purpose, it is necessary to acquaint the Public with the Proposals.

As they are the most advantageous of the Kind ever know, and I may venture to say, that ever will be:

The Situation, Fertility of the Soil, Navigation, and innumerable other Advantages that attends this Colony, over and above any that can be mentioned in the American Empire, are Inducements sufficient for any sensible Men to settle there without the least Hesitation; but as Mankind are fond of being secured in the real Enjoyment of something independent, it is proposed that every Family who becomes Proprietors and Settlers in this Colony are to have 300 Acres of Land, to be granted by Patent to them and their Heirs forever. It is also proposed that 400,000 Acres are to be sold to Gentlemen Proprietors which will be granted in Patents



Thomas Kitchin, *A New and Accurate Map of the British Dominions in America, According to the Treaty of 1763, 1763* (detail); green line emphasizing Ohio River in original

<sup>6</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, Philadelphia, 21 April 1763. Colonial Records Project, N.C. Office of Archives and History, at [www.ncpublications.com/colonial/Newspapers/subjects/Agri.htm#1763](http://www.ncpublications.com/colonial/Newspapers/subjects/Agri.htm#1763).

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, Letter to Peter Collinson, London, 19 December 1763. Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library and the American Philosophical Society.

from One Thousand to Ten Thousand Acres each, these are proposed to be sold at the Rate of £50 per Thousand Acres, which will raise a Sum of £2000, which is to be employed in purchasing the Colony, Provisions, Cattle, and farming Utensils, &c.

The Extent of the Colony as proposed is nine Degrees of North Latitude and nine Degrees of West Longitude, beginning at the ninth Degree from Philadelphia, and ending at the seventeenth Degree of Western Longitude, Latitude from 36 to 44.

The Name of the Colony is to be NEW-WALES, in Honour of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, who is to be sole Proprietor of the Colony.

As the settling of this Colony will be effected as soon as possible, it is desired that all Planters, Farmers and others who are inclined to settle give in their Names by the last of May; as also, those Gentlemen who are inclined to become Purchasers, as their Names will be sent to England, and the Patents made out there, if approved.

The Numbers of Families proposed to form the first Settlement are 4000, who are to march in two Divisions, and are to compose two Cities or Towns for the more Convenience of laying out the Land round each. They will be laid out upon the River, and every Advantage taken, both with respect to the Navigation and Situation.

This Colony will be so advantageously situated, with respect to the easy Navigation to the West-Indies, that the Inhabitants will be able to transport their Commodities in a few Days, That is to say, Those that are in Demand, viz. [namely] Lumber, Live stock, Pork, Beef and Flour, many of which Articles they may raise the first Year, besides some for Great-Britain, particularly Tobacco, which, in that rich Soil is easily cultivated and turns out to great Advantage.

But, as the Articles of Produce are taken Notice of in a Work which will be shortly published for that Purpose, I shall omit it here. Every Family must have two Draught-Oxen, all Sorts of Breeding Stock, and every Kind of

***“The Colony will march from Philadelphia, and proper Notice will be given in the public Papers with respect to the Time the Colonists are to meet.”***

farming Utensils. The Colony will march from Philadelphia, and proper Notice will be given in the public Papers with respect to the Time the Colonists are to meet. The Grants for the Land will be given before they march from Philadelphia. Upon the Delivery of the Patents, each Family must pay Five Pounds, which is also to be laid out in Provisions for the March, as many People will omit providing those Articles, from the great Distance they will have to come to Philadelphia.

Great Encouragement will be given to Millwrights, Wheelwrights, House Carpenters, Ship Carpenters, Blacksmiths, &c. Ships will be provided at Philadelphia to transport the Artificers, Tools, farming Utensils, Provisions and Seed-Corn.

Those who are determined to embrace this Opportunity are desired to send their Names to the under-mentioned Persons in the different Provinces [colonies] within the Time mentioned, viz.

Pennsylvania	to Mr. WILLIAM DUNLAP, in Philadelphia; to MATTHIAS SLOUGH, Esq; in Lancaster.
Boston Government, and Connecticut,	Governments to the Eastward, to Colonel WILLIAM GRIDLEY.
Rhode-Island,	to Brigadier LYMAN.
New York,	to Colonel BABCOCK.
New Jersey	to Mr. GARRET NOEL.
	Eastern Division, to Mr. HUDE, at New Brunswick.
	Western Division, to, JOHN LAWRENCE, Esq; in Burlington
Maryland,	to WILLIAM NICHOLSON, Esq; at Newtown.
Virginia,	to BENJAMIN YOUNG, Esq;
North-Carolina,	
South-Carolina,	

T. WEBB, Lieut. of the 48th Regiment, one of the Proposalists.

N.B. [*Nota bene*: note well.] All Persons are desired to pay Postage that send Letters to any of the above Gentlemen, or they will not be regarded