

Land Grants Part 3: Land Grants and the Recruitment of Settlers to the Carolina Colony ^[1]

Land Grants

by David Southern and Louis P. Towles, 2006

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Land Grants and the Recruitment of Settlers to the Carolina Colony

Land grants were also given to individuals on a much more modest scale. A recipient, in exchange for a land grant, was obliged to pay each year an established rent (called a [quitrent](#) ^[4]), either nominal, such as peppercorn or Indian arrows, or real in the form of sterling ([coin](#) ^[5]) or produce. Beginning in 1667, every free person who came to the province was eligible to receive 40 acres under the system. Each servant entitled the owner to 20 additional acres, and rents were to be remitted for a period of three to five years to allow the settlers to establish themselves.



Lithograph of Sir John Yeamans. Image from the Library of Congress.

^[6]Since the recruitment of people was often difficult, grants were gradually increased to 100 acres for a freeman with a gun and powder who could come on his own and 50 acres for a person who had to be transported. Although it was possible to receive sizable grants-such as 6,000 acres to [Sir John Yeamans](#) ^[7] in 1665 to assist him in subsidizing a settlement and 1,500 acres to Captain William Merrick that same year to help him undertake a voyage-such gifts were unusual and could only be assigned directly by the [Proprietors](#) ^[8] in London. As rule, less than 700 acres was the maximum amount of land allowed to be granted or regranted in the province.

Grants were awarded by a process in which a recipient first received a warrant, then a [survey](#) ^[9] of land, or plat, and finally the grant itself. Each part of the process was to be checked by the appropriate provincial official before the grant was finally approved, and if the procedure was not followed completely, the property would revert to the granter, with the grantee often subject to a fine. In addition, if a person failed to properly "seat" his grant-that is, clear and work the requisite number of acres within three years-died without heirs, or failed to pay [quitrents](#) ^[4], the land could be lost and regranted to someone else.

By 1715, through the intervention of the Proprietors and the North Carolina Assembly, grantees had received certain important rights. By decree from London, an impoverished family that could not pay its rent was not to be deprived of the land, and those that had been were to have property restored. In addition, by action of the Assembly and the agreement of the governor in council, all existing grants were declared valid, and all claims based on seven years' occupancy of the land were considered legal.

The price of the perpetual lease in the land grant system began under the Proprietors as a farthing per acre in 1663 and gradually rose to a penny per acre by 1669. In the early 1700s these payments varied widely. Settlers came to resent the arbitrary and permanent nature of the quitrents, particularly since the Proprietors often refused to accept payment in produce or proclamation money as they had promised to, demanding payment in sterling instead.

The purchase of North Carolina by the [English Crown](#) ^[10] in 1729 failed to noticeably improve either the process of granting land or the collection of quitrents. Payment rates were stabilized under the Crown, but they also became more expensive.

Land was still surveyed but not recorded, or it was claimed through blank grants circulated among the elite. While the continued lack of accurate rent rolls made taxation difficult, the reluctance of the Crown to accept produce or proclamation money in lieu of sterling made payment at times impossible. As a result, on the eve of the American Revolution ^[11], many quitrents were thousands of pounds in arrears.

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Image Credits:

Bufford, J.H. [Sir John Yeamans, 1610-1674, head and shoulders]. Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007682386/> ^[6]

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