



## *Period Overview:*

### **Contacts and Connections – 1541 to 1670**

The proto-historic period in what became the Carolinas was a time of initial contacts between Native Americans and European explorers and the establishment of connections between Europeans and Native communities. For most of the period, Native lifeways continued largely unchanged from before the arrival of Europeans. However, as the effects of European colonization spread, this became a time of great change for Native Americans in the region (Smith, 2005).

Native peoples in North Carolina first encountered Europeans in the sixteenth century as Spanish, English, and French explorers searched the continent for gold and silver, and land. The earliest European explorers to land in the southeastern United States were Spanish conquistadors searching for riches. Spaniards sought to establish trade routes between Europe and conquered lands to the south in Mexico. Many of these early expeditions were flawed from the beginning due to Spain's poor understanding of North American geography or the vastness of the distance between the Atlantic Coast and northern Mexico. In 1513 Spaniard Juan Ponce de León's ship landed near the modern-day city of St. Augustine. He named this land La Florida, and it was not long before other Spaniards began exploring the interior lands.

While several Spanish entradas, or armies, traveled the islands of the Caribbean and the coastal areas of the mainland, it is unlikely most of these early explorers had a major impact on American Indian groups in North Carolina. The expedition of Hernando de Soto passed through North Carolina in the spring of 1540, followed by Juan Pardo's expedition in the same area thirty years later. In 1584, the English began their first attempts to settle in northeastern North Carolina, but it was not until after around 1650 when North Carolina's Indians felt the brunt of European presence on their land. This was the beginning of significant and often devastating changes in the histories of North Carolina's tribes (Hudson, 1997, p. 32; Moore, 2006; Ward & Davis, 1999). Over the following century, interactions among Native peoples and European explorers, traders, and settlers increased as English groups attempted and established settlements along the coast and explored the sounds and rivers of what would become the Carolinas. The end of the proto-historic period is punctuated by the founding of the first permanent English settlement on the Ashley River at Albemarle Point in 1670, following the formal establishment of the colony of Carolina by royal charter to eight lord proprietors in England.

Scholars studying Native American lifeways in the proto-historic period, or the period of early Native-European contact, combine information from sources such as European accounts, archaeological information, and the oral histories and knowledge of Native Americans living today. Native North Americans did not have a written language when European explorers arrived, and knowledge was transmitted verbally within and between communities, and from one generation to the next through oral traditions and storytelling. We also know about the past from



the written accounts and illustrations of Europeans who reported on the daily lives of Native Americans. Blending these different ways of knowing about the past is an approach called ethnohistory, whose goal is to understand the kinship relations, marriage practices, beliefs and mythology, and day-to-day household activities of Native Americans before and during the proto-historic period.

The proto-historic period and related themes are covered in more detail with the following topics:

- Proto-historic lifeways
- The Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo expeditions
- The Secotan: Manteo, John White, and the European image of Indian America
- Foodways, cooking practices, and new foods introduced during European colonization

## References

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Moore, D. G., (2006). Pardo Expeditions. NCpedia.org. <https://www.ncpedia.org/pardo-expeditions>, accessed May 2022.

Smith, M. T., (2005). Understanding the Protohistoric Period in the Southeast. *Arqueología Histórica* 23:215-229.

Ward, H. T., & Davis, R.P S., Jr., (1999). *Time before history: The archaeology of North Carolina*. University of North Carolina Press.