

## CAPE FEAR COLONY

In my book I described the arrival of the *Thistle* in 1739, bringing the first settlers from Argyll to the new colony of Cape Fear, North Carolina. It was said that it carried around 350 people, a very large number for such a small ship. Recent evidence (see below) has been unearthed that suggests the *Thistle* was in fact accompanied by a second ship, the *Charming Molly*. While this new evidence isn't sufficient to say for definitely that this was the case, it does, however, at least offer a reasonable explanation of how 350 people arrived in Cape Fear in 1739.

Thanks to Anne Landin, editor for *The Argyll Colony Plus* journal of the North Carolina Scottish Heritage Society, for providing me with the article below.

# A Companion for the *Thistle*: the *Charming Molly* and the Argyll Colony of 1739

by

Robert J. Cain, Editor

*Colonial Records of North Carolina* [Second Series]

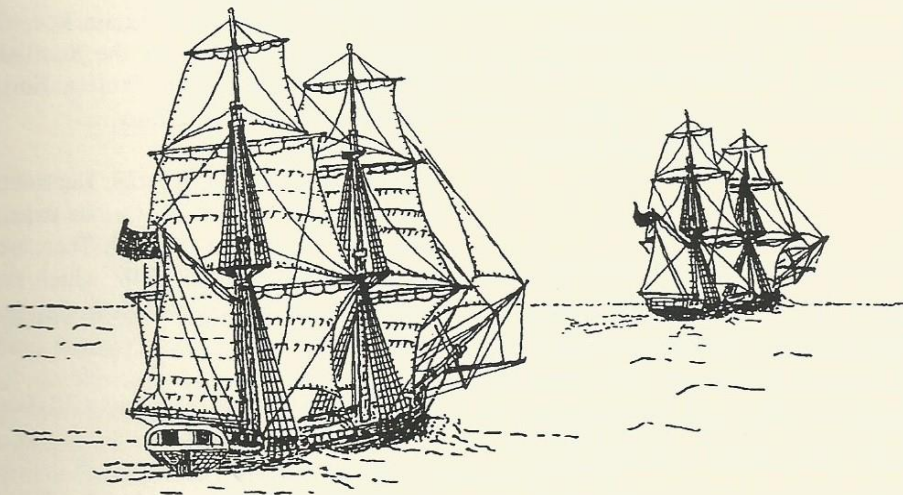
Robert J. Cain currently serves as the head of the Colonial Records Project at the State Archives in Raleigh, North Carolina, and has been the editor of the *Colonial Records of North Carolina* [Second Series] since 1975. A Magna Cum Laude graduate of Wake Forest University in 1961, he received an M.A. in history in 1965 from Duke University and a Ph.D. in history there in 1971. He has served as instructor in both of the above universities, and was a resident researcher in London, England, for the North Carolina Colonial Records Project from 1969-1975. He has a number of publications to his credit as well as having presented a number of papers at such prestigious institutions as the Southern Historical Association, the National Genealogical Society, and the Federation of Genealogical Societies. Among some of his papers concerning North Carolina are "The North Carolina British Records Collection" (1986); "Colonial North Carolina: Early Settlers and Their Records (1992); and "The Scottish Records Program of the North Carolina Colonial Records Project" which was presented to the North Carolina Scottish Heritage Society in 1996.

The June 5, 1739, issue of a newspaper published in Belfast, Northern Ireland, *The Belfast News-Letter and General Advertiser*, carried a brief news item that adds significantly to what we previously knew about the earliest days of the Argyll Colony. The transcribed text of the article is as follows:

**The snow, *Charming Molly*, belonging to Mr. Henry Mc.Lachlen, of this place, is now clear to sail hence for the isle of Gea [*sic*], in the Highlands of Scotland, where a great number of Highland gentlemen are to go on board her and another vessel, whereof one Mr. Brown is master, and will carry with them upwards of 200 musquets, and a greater number of broad swords and other arms, bound for Cape Faire [*sic*], in South [*sic*] Carolina, in America.**

The other vessel, "whereof Mr. Brown is master," was the *Thistle*, which carried Argyll colonists to Cape Fear. *Thistle's* name and that of the master for that voyage, Robert Brown, have been known for some years. Customs records for the port of Campbeltown reveal that in May and June, 1739, *Thistle*, after loading provisions in Ireland, was taking on passengers for Cape Fear.<sup>1</sup>

In 1738 the vessel made a voyage out of the port of Philadelphia with a James Brown as master, and since at least 1730 a vessel by the name of *Thistle* (almost certainly the same craft as the Argyll Colony *Thistle*) had under several different masters made numerous voyages into Philadelphia from various ports in the West Indies, as well as from Newfoundland and European ports such as Lisbon, Cork, Dublin, Bristol, and Cowes (Isle of Wight).<sup>2</sup> The relatively large number of passengers presumed to have been carried by



The snow *Charming Molly* and the brig *Thistle* set sail for Cape Fear - 1739.

*Thistle* alone has, however, puzzled historians over the years. The 350 given in various historical publications over the years seems far too great a number for such a vessel. However, the author has verified that the manuscript on which the figure is based—a legislative journal printed in William L. Saunders's *Colonial Records of North Carolina*—indeed says 350. One way to resolve this dilemma is to bring a second ship into the picture, which this newspaper account clearly does.

There is no evidence known at present that would corroborate the story. On the other hand, there is no known evidence that would disprove it, and if the number of immigrants in the Argyll Colony was indeed 350, there must have been a second vessel involved—and possibly even more.

The mention of “upwards of’ 200 muskets, and a “greater number” of broadswords “and other arms,” is an intriguing and valuable piece of information not given in any other source known to the author. Although some of the weaponry could have

been intended as trade goods, such numbers definitely suggest that 350 Argyll colonists—of whom numbers would have been women and children—is entirely plausible.

Henry McLachlen, the owner of *Charming Molly*, was, according to this account, a resident of Belfast, and undoubtedly a merchant. The vessel was a snow, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as “A small sailing-vessel ... carrying a main and fore mast and a supplementary trysail mast close behind the mainmast.” Christopher Crittenden, in *The Commerce of North Carolina, 1763-1789* (Yale University Press, 1936), page 11, notes that the snow was one of the larger trading vessels, and was nearly always used for transatlantic rather than coastal voyages. Many of them also carried passengers as well as freight.

Three years before the Argyll Colony landed at Cape Fear, a snow by the name of *Charming Molly* advertised in Philadelphia for freight and passengers for Dublin or Belfast. A few months later it cleared the port of Philadelphia for Belfast, with Henry

McLachlin as master.<sup>3</sup> *Charming Molly*, or at least a vessel with this name and a master named John Murray, cleared Philadelphia for Cape Fear in October, 1740. As late as 1750, this time with a Newell Harris as master, a *Charming Molly* was trading to North Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the newspaper advertisement, it could be that for some reason *Charming Molly* did not, in fact, make the voyage to Cape Fear with immigrants and arms. But until convincing evidence to the contrary appears, it is unquestionably reasonable to assume that *Thistle* did, in fact, have a hitherto unknown companion in carrying the Argyll colonists to North Carolina in 1739.

**Endnotes:**

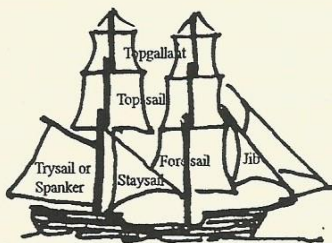
<sup>1</sup>CE.82/2/79, Customs and Excise Records, Scottish Record Office, copied for the Scottish Records Program, Colonial Records Project, North Carolina Division of Archives & History.

<sup>2</sup>*Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 23, December 3, 1730; July 15, 1731; 1732-1738, various dates; April 12, September 30, October 18, 1739. There are no further entries for *Thistle* until 1748, which suggests the possibility that the vessel was lost after the voyage to Cape Fear.

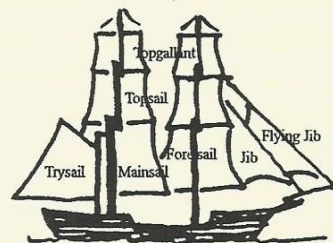
<sup>3</sup>*Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 30, December 23, 1736.

<sup>4</sup>*Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 2, 1740- October 8, 15, 1747; June 7, 21, 28, 1750. The vessels of this name were rigged variously as snows, schooners, and sloops.

**BRIGS AND SNOWS**



Brig



Snow

The *Charming Molly* is described as a *snow*. The *Thistle*, under James Brown, is listed in *Lloyd's Register* for 1776 as a *brig* of 120 ton displacement (possibly another vessel due to the 37 year difference).

Brigs and snows are almost identical, the only difference being in the mounting of the trysail on the mainmast. On a brig, a gaff spanker or trysail was mounted directly on the mainmast. This interfered with the installation of a mainsail,

so it was omitted and a staysail was attached to the mainmast. On a snow, the spanker was set on a trysail mast which was a secondary mast set just behind the mainmast and attached to it at the top. This arrangement allowed for the use of a square mainsail on the mainmast.

Since the snow rigging allowed for more sail area, many brigs were rigged as snows. The term *snow* fell into disuse and the term *brig* was used whether they had snow rigging or not.