

## Introduction

In early December, 1753, colonial representatives for John, Lord Carteret (Earl Granville), granted sixteen tracts of land along the Piedmont’s rolling hills within the bounds of Buffalo and Reedy Creeks in the extreme northeastern portion of Rowan (Guilford) County, North Carolina, on the eastern edge of the backcountry.<sup>1</sup> (figure 1) One grant declared that the tract of land was one of thirty reserved for the Nottingham Settlement in March 1750.<sup>2</sup> Before 1771, when Guilford County was created from Rowan and Orange Counties, more families would purchase grants within a central section of Guilford County approximately sixteen miles wide and nine miles long and join the eleven initial purchasers and their families in creating a loosely knit community in the North Carolina Piedmont bound together by common traits—property (landownership, material possessions and wealth), kinship, Scots-Irish heritage, and Presbyterianism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The county name used to identify the location of the land purchased by those associated with the Nottingham Settlement changed three times within the era of the pioneering generation’s arrival. First named Anson County in 1749, the section known as Rowan County separated from the parent county in 1753. Then in 1771, the colonial authorities created Guilford County out of the extreme northeast section of Rowan County and the extreme western section of Orange County. In order to differentiate between modern Rowan County which is located to the far south and west of Guilford County and the location of the Nottingham Settlement land tracts in Guilford County, “Rowan (Guilford) County” will be used throughout this essay to designate the geographical location of the land before Guilford County’s creation in 1771.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Thompson, 350 acres, Rowan (August 2, 1760), Secretary of State Record Group, Granville Proprietary Land Office: Land Entries, Warrants, and Plats of Survey. North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh (NCDAH) (referred to as “Granville Grants”). “. . . being one of the 30 Entries of the Nottingham Settle[ment].” Use of the term “Settlement” in this essay refers to a group of land plots and not an organized settlement by a colonial religious sect (e.g., Puritans, Moravians) or a Utopian society. No formal contract binding the settlers to a land venture survives, whether one existed or not. Most local and family historians refer to the Nottingham Settlement as the “Nottingham Colony.” Because the Granville land grants refer to the “Nottingham Settlement,” I will use Nottingham Settlement.

<sup>3</sup> Fred Hughes, *Guilford County, N.C.: a Map Supplement* (Jamestown, N.C.: The Custom House, 1988), 52. To account for the manner in which tracts were numbered, Hughes explains that “the grants were numbered according to the issuance of the warrant [in 1750] not the survey of the land.” He continues, saying that the “number does not indicate the order of the final grant.”

Many of the initial settlers (or pioneering generation) were related either by birth or marriage.<sup>4</sup> Before migrating to North Carolina, most of the families had resided in southeastern Pennsylvania and extreme northern Maryland.<sup>5</sup> (figure 3) A majority of the men and their wives were either first-generation Scots-Irish immigrants or children and grandchildren of immigrants from Scotland or Northern Ireland.<sup>6</sup> These men established themselves early on as responsible landowners within then Rowan County, serving as jurors, justices of the peace, constables and overseers of the roads.<sup>7</sup> All of the families participated in the founding of or were affiliated with the Buffalo Presbyterian Church located within the community.<sup>8</sup> With the exception of those who died within a

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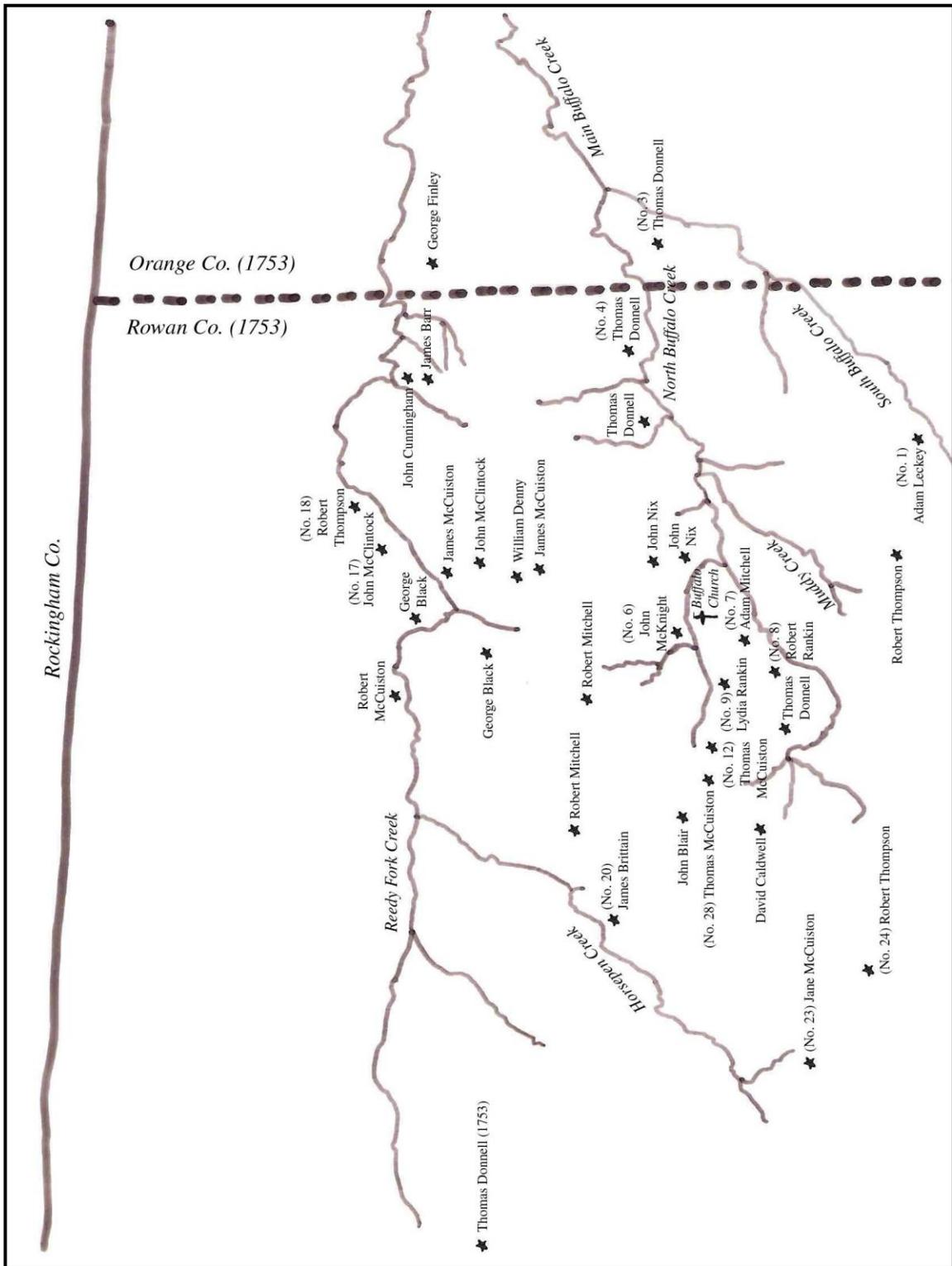
<sup>4</sup> Throughout this study, I use the term “pioneering generation” to differentiate between the men and women who first settled in the Rowan (Guilford) County area in the 1750s and 1760s and those who either arrived or were born after 1760. The pioneering generation was also multigenerational and depending on the family, included both parents and their adult progeny. Use of this term will limit not only the individuals involved but the period studied.

<sup>5</sup> George Johnston, *History of Cecil County, Maryland*, 1881; repr. Baltimore: Regional Publishing Company, 1967, 145–46. Prior to 1715, the proprietors of Pennsylvania took advantage of the internal religious and political struggles faced by Maryland’s colonial government and its Catholic landlord Lord Baltimore during the English Revolution and granted land to Protestants looking for acreage in the region just south of the original Pennsylvania-Maryland line (known as the “Nottingham Lots”); essentially annexing a small section of Maryland into Lancaster County. The establishment of the Mason-Dixon Line officially placed this section of land under Maryland’s jurisdiction in 1768. (See figure 3.)

<sup>6</sup> While the immigration dates for many in this community are unknown due to the practice at the time of not documenting the arrival in America of immigrants from the British Isles, the descendants of several men have relied on family tradition when making this claim. Based on land records and wills found in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, two of the men, John Cunningham and Samuel Scott, were at least second-generation immigrants. Depending on the situation, some scholars prefer to use the terms “Scots Irish,” “Ulster Scots” or “Ulster Presbyterian” in place of “Scotch-Irish,” which seemed to be the term of choice for historians until more recent times. Throughout the following chapter, I will defer to the choice made by the author whose work is reviewed. When discussing the Nottingham Settlement, I will use the term “Scots Irish.” For further information on the evolution of the various terms applied to Protestant immigrants from Ulster, see Kerby A. Miller, “‘Scotch-Irish’ Ethnicity in Early America: Its Regional and Political Origins,” in *Ireland and Irish America Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration* (Dublin : Field Day, 2008), 125–138.

<sup>7</sup> Rowan County Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions (referred to as “Rowan Co. Minutes”) 2:59, 79, 93, 121.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Rankin, *A History of Buffalo Presbyterian Church and Her People, Greensboro, N.C.* (Greensboro, N.C.: Jos. J. Stone & Co, [1934?]), 22–28.



**Figure 1.** Location of the Nottingham Settlement’s pioneering generation in Rowan (Guilford) County, N.C., 1753–1760. (Drawing by Wendy L. Adams with assistance by Rachel M. Popma. Points of reference based on Fred Hughes’ map of colonial Guilford County, North Carolina (Jamestown, N.C.: Custom House, 1980).)

decade of receiving their land grant(s), the pioneering generation increased their land holdings within the county.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the descendants of the Nottingham Settlement's pioneering generation remained in the vicinity of the original land grants after the Revolutionary War.<sup>10</sup> Although land conveyances, poll tax lists and court records remain, personal documents (such as diaries and account books) have not survived to provide the details of the lives of early Nottingham Settlement members. Local and regional histories give the most basic of information about their existence in the early formation of the county. What is known (e.g., names, birth and death dates, and descendents) fails to present a comprehensive account of either the individuals involved or the creation and existence of the community itself. What physical and social boundaries defined the inclusion of settlers in this informally constructed community? What individual characteristics and accomplishments identify them as members of this community? Exploring proximity and social, cultural, and religious experiences as well as material wealth of the settlers aids in identifying the Nottingham Settlement's pioneering and subsequent generations. Investigating the Nottingham Settlement's communal identity in turn speaks to a larger question—what external influences motivated these individuals to relocate their families from southeastern Pennsylvania to central North Carolina and how characteristic was this resettlement to the colonial experience?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I base this on the many land indentures made by Settlement members as recorded in deed books for both Rowan and Guilford Counties from 1753 to 1780. See appendix A for further information on land acquisitions made by individual settlers.

<sup>10</sup> Some families, such as the Adam Mitchell family, left Guilford County after the Revolutionary War and migrated to Tennessee or further west.

<sup>11</sup> Much of what is known about the Nottingham Settlement and its members comes from Rankin's *A History of Buffalo Presbyterian Church*, which provides the barest of facts about both the individuals and the community as a whole.

To determine the motivation behind the Nottingham Settlement members' migration to and settlement in Rowan (Guilford) County, I propose that factors used to identify the Nottingham Settlement, such as proximity, society, culture and religion, establish a model for the North Carolina backcountry community in the mid-eighteenth century. The following study supports this thesis by providing local and family historians with an in-depth view of the lives of those associated with the Nottingham Settlement as well as others residing nearby in colonial Guilford County. Exploring the communal identity of the Nottingham Settlement, I rely on the methods employed in similar backcountry community studies but subject to variations due to the availability of extant source materials for this specific set of colonists.

My study of the Nottingham Settlement centers on twenty-one individuals—the eleven who purchased the initial Granville land grants in December 1753, and ten other participants in the community (men and women who purchased tracts initially reserved for the Nottingham Settlement as well as other landowners associated with the Settlement.) I determined the qualifications of those included in the sample based on information gleaned from the individual Granville grants as well as later land conveyance records. In many instances, the grants do not mention the Nottingham Settlement or the number of the tract allotted to the Settlement. Therefore, when necessary, I relied on Samuel M. Rankin's early-twentieth-century history of the Settlement (*A History of Buffalo Presbyterian Church and Her People, Greensboro, N.C.*) for information about the group's beginning and used the date (on the contract) of December 1753 as a basis for deciding who purchased one of the thirty tracts.<sup>12</sup> I also based my sample of the

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<sup>12</sup> Although some of the original thirty tracts cannot be discerned (based on the contract's description), I have endeavored to assign Nottingham Settlement tract numbers to individuals when

Settlement's pioneering generation on kinship, church association and further information provided by Rankin.

The reader should not consider my choice of persons or families as comprehensive. The sample of twenty-one men and women includes: James Barr (?–1805?), John Blair (abt. 1700–abt. 1772), David Caldwell (1725–1824), John Cunningham (1725–1762), William Denny (1713–1770), Robert Donnell Sr. (1728?–1816?), Thomas Donnell (1712–1795), George Finley (1723–1802), Adam Leakey/Lackey/Leckey (?–1800), John McClintock (1713–1807), James McCuiston Sr. (1700–1765), Robert McCuiston/McQuiston/McQuestion Sr. (1710–1765), Thomas McCuiston Sr. (1704–abt. 1758), John McKnight “IV” (?–1770), Adam Mitchell (1712–1794), Robert Mitchell (abt 1713–1775), John Nicks/Nix (1716–1781), Lydia (Steele) Rankin Forbis (abt. 1733–bef. 1789), Robert Rankin (?–1795), Samuel Scott (?–1777), and Robert Thompson (1723–1771).

Using “Germans on the Maryland Frontier: A Social History of Frederick County, Maryland, 1730-1800,” Elizabeth Kessel’s 1981 dissertation on a German community in colonial Frederick County, Maryland, as an example, I divide my study into two sections—the first supplies historical context related to members’ experiences before their migration to North Carolina, and the second analyzes settlers’ lives after the pioneering generation purchased land in Rowan (Guilford) County.<sup>13</sup>

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possible. (See table 3.1 in chapter 3.) Without an extant comprehensive plat map or register for the Granville grants, I cannot explain the numbering system employed (how a tract number was assigned—whether based on location or time of assignment) or provide a complete listing of tract owners.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Augusta Kessel, “Germans on the Maryland Frontier: A Social History of Frederick County, Maryland, 1730-1800, (volume I-II)” (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 1981). Kessel explores the “subtle balance between cultural persistence and accommodation that [eighteenth-century German-speaking] settlers achieved” after immigrating to America.(iv) In volume one, she explains the European circumstances surrounding the pioneering generation’s emigration to America and supplies a brief, general history of colonial Maryland and Frederick County at the time of her target group’s arrival. She also

In chapter one, I provide a review of the literature surrounding community studies and the southern backcountry. Written within the past thirty to forty years, the books, journal articles and dissertations I consulted represent the most recent research on community studies and colonial America. I separate the literature into four sections—geography, kinship, cultural heritage, and religion. A summary at the end of this chapter links relevant information found within the literature to the experiences of the Nottingham Settlement.

In chapter two, I present general background information pertinent to Settlement members prior to their arrival in Rowan (Guilford) County as well as events occurring during their lives in mid-eighteenth-century North Carolina. Because the families are predominantly first-, second- or third-generation Scots-Irish immigrants who first settled in southeastern Pennsylvania/northern Maryland, I briefly describe conditions in Ireland and southeastern Pennsylvania/northern Maryland that may have precipitated their migration to America and then the southern backcountry. In addition to this cultural overview, I come to similar conclusions regarding the idea of previous connections

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discusses the immigrant generations' motives for emigrating and a general description of the settlers as a community (e.g., social and marital status). Kessel then analyzes the community's economic, religious, and social experiences after settling in Frederick County, utilizing available county (e.g., land conveyance, tax and court) and church records. Kessel investigates landownership—the acquisition, use, and distribution to heirs—of the pioneering generation to determine the settlers' impact on Frederick County's growing economy. When exploring the influence of religion and religious institutions on the settlers, she analyzes the emphasis placed on education and literacy. In volume two, Kessel describes the German-speaking community's interaction with those outside their community, examining their civic and political involvement in the county. Lastly, she explores the contributions ethnicity makes to one's acculturation in English colonial America. To reinforce her conclusions about the pioneering German-speaking settlers of Frederick County, Kessel developed "a codebook for regularized collection of the information" found in probate, land, and church records and newspapers and prepared a genealogy for each family who had remained in the county five years after its initial land purchase.(352)

existing between Settlement members before 1753 by showing that Settlement members either lived within the same community or previously knew fellow members.<sup>14</sup>

I demonstrate how these families may have known of each other previously, either before or after migration to America. To determine a possible Irish connection, I trace family name origins in Ulster during the mid to late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century using published Irish probate records.<sup>15</sup> Because eighteenth-century American Presbyterian church records have not survived, I rely on land conveyance records, tax lists and probate records in Pennsylvania (and Maryland when appropriate) to locate members in Lancaster County and nearby counties, such as Cecil County, Maryland, and then discuss the possibility that Settlement families lived near each other prior to their migration to North Carolina.<sup>16</sup> To compensate for a lack of consistently available documentation for each member, I follow Peter N. Moore's example in *World of Toil and Strife* and depend on the presence of others bearing the same surname living in the general vicinity (in probate, tax and cemetery records) of fellow Nottingham

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<sup>14</sup> Settlement members' existence in Pennsylvania and Maryland is difficult to trace. Although a few of the men owned land in southeastern Pennsylvania and northern Maryland before their arrival in North Carolina, others do not appear in either colony's deed books. Other than land conveyance and tax records, additional sources tracking their existence in Pennsylvania and Maryland are scarce—Presbyterians refrained from recording marriages with the local, civil authorities; congregational records of the Presbyterian Church are either incomplete or non-existent; and even though some court records of those residing in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, during the eighteenth century survive, the Settlement members' use of commonly-held first names (e.g., John, William, James) makes discerning the identity of those entered in court proceedings difficult.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas M. Blagg, ed., *Indexes to Irish Wills*, Vol. V (London: Phillimore and Co., 1920); and P. Beryl Eustace, ed., *Registry of Deeds Dublin: Abstract of Wills, Vol. I, 1708–1745* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1956).

<sup>16</sup> John Blair, John Cunningham, James McCuiston, Robert McCuiston, and Samuel Scott appear in Warrant Registers (Records of the Land Office, Pennsylvania State Archives) for either Cumberland or Lancaster County (in 1750, Cumberland County separated from Lancaster County), while surnames associated with the Nottingham Settlement, such as Black, Cummings, Mitchell and Rankin, also appear.

Settlement members to demonstrate the probability or possibility of their acquaintance with Settlement members.<sup>17</sup>

Chapter three investigates and analyzes the social and religious factors shared by the Settlement's pioneering generation, addressing the residential proximity of members both before and after their arrival in North Carolina, their participation in the Presbyterian Church, their attitudes toward education, and the extent of their material possessions. In keeping with historical geographers such as James Lemon, Robert D. Mitchell and Warren Hofstra, I utilize North Carolina land conveyance records to confirm that Settlement members purchased contiguous parcels of land in Rowan (Guilford) County, North Carolina.<sup>18</sup> Because no official plat map of Rowan (Guilford) County exists for the eighteenth century, I have constructed a schematic plat of the properties associated with my sample group based on geographer Fred Hughes's work in *Guilford County, N.C.: A Map Supplement* and the book's accompanying map of colonial Guilford County.<sup>19</sup> (figure 1) Based on land conveyance, probate and poll tax records, I also explore the pioneering generation's material possessions and the distribution of their real and personal estates.

To analyze the kinship and social relationships existing between the initial landowners, I have ascertained common experiences and personal events encountered by

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<sup>17</sup> Peter N. Moore, *World of Toil and Strife: Community Transformation in Backcountry South Carolina, 1750–1805* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 115–117. See appendix 2 in Moore's book.

<sup>18</sup> James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977); and Warren R. Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Fred Hughes, *Guilford County, N.C.: a Map Supplement* (Jamestown, N.C.: The Custom House, 1988), 52–53. Although individual Granville Grants include a surveyor's drawing of the tract in question, the lack of an existing comprehensive plat map from this time period hindered my ability to piece the individual plats together. Therefore, I had to rely on Fred Hughes' work in order to provide an intelligent schematic of the Settlement's boundaries as well as the location of the pioneering generation's land.

Nottingham Settlement's members. Based on the example of short biographies published in Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard, and Lorena S. Walsh's *Robert Cole's World*, I first develop a standardized narrative of those included in the sample.<sup>20</sup> When necessary, I supplement personal facts from land conveyance records, probate records, county court session minutes, and tax records found in both Pennsylvania (or Maryland) and North Carolina with information provided by family and local histories (book and Web-based). I borrowed the concept of "record stripping" from both Kessel's dissertation and Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman's *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750*.<sup>21</sup> These short biographies allow me to assess the similarities and differences of members of the Settlement and develop tables to support my analysis.

To better understand the Settlement's affiliation with the Presbyterian Church, I explore the community's church associations in Pennsylvania and North Carolina. Based on a reference published in a twentieth-century history of the Presbyterian Church established by the Nottingham Settlement community, I investigate the possible connections between the Settlement's association with Old and New Side Presbyterian congregations in Pennsylvania (and Maryland) and the pioneering generation's subsequent migration to North Carolina.<sup>22</sup> In particular, I discuss the Settlement's

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<sup>20</sup> Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard and Lorena S. Walsh, *Robert Cole's World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750*, vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 1984); and Kessel, "Germans on the Maryland Frontier." Kessel's method of organizing and analyzing individual lives to understand the community as a whole provides a model for studying other communities. Using available records (e.g., land conveyance, probate, tax), she gleaned facts for selected community members, quantified and codified each fact based on a numeric system within a database, and determined commonly-held characteristics of the community at large. From the database, she explored family and kinship, naming patterns, family size, and inheritance patterns.

<sup>22</sup> The Great Awakening's focus on an emotional religious experience and expression of one's faith divided the American Presbyterian Church into two camps—those who held to more conservative and traditional viewpoints, with their emphasis on holy living ("Old Side") and those who embraced a conversion experience and an emotional expression of religious beliefs and practices ("New Side"). See chapter 2 for more on this topic.

connections to two Presbyterian ministers—John Thomson (father of Robert Thompson, initial owner of one of the thirty Nottingham tracts), a proponent of the Old Side; and New-Side advocate Samuel Findley (brother of George Finley, a Settlement member), from whose congregation (Nottingham Presbyterian Church) some of the pioneering generation are believed to have come.<sup>23</sup>

I rely on three books—E. W. Caruthers’s *A Sketch of the Life and Character of the Rev. David Caldwell, D.D.* (1842), William Henry Foote’s *Sketches of North Carolina*, (1846) and Samuel M. Rankin’s *A History of Buffalo Presbyterian Church and Her People, Greensboro, N.C.* (1934)—to provide information on the Settlement’s involvement with the Buffalo Presbyterian Church.<sup>24</sup> I supplement the facts provided by Caruthers, Foote and Rankin with transcribed and published works on the local Presbytery, documentation from the national Presbyterian Synod, and the limited extant congregational record of Buffalo Presbyterian Church’s first four decades. A cursory look at the North Carolina church’s first ministers—Hugh McAden, the itinerant preacher who held the first church meeting for the Settlement, and David Caldwell, the church’s ecclesiastical leader between 1764 and 1820—augments my research.<sup>25</sup>

In chapter four, I provide an overview and summary of the Nottingham Settlement information I have presented and develop conclusions concerning the

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<sup>23</sup> Rankin, *Buffalo Presbyterian Church*, 14. Prior to 1768, the Nottingham congregation considered itself a part of what was once lower Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Since 1768, it has been officially part of Cecil County, Maryland.

<sup>24</sup> E. W. Caruthers, *A Sketch of the Life and Character of the Rev. David Caldwell, D.D.: Near Sixty Years Pastor of the Churches of Buffalo and Alamance* (Greensborough, N.C.: Printed by Swaim and Sherwood, 1842); and William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina: Historical and Biographical, Illustrative of the Principles of a Portion of Her Early Settlers* (New York: Robert Carter, 1846). Extant church records for the Buffalo Presbyterian Church (Greensboro, N.C.) are limited to session meeting records from 1777 to 1788, and do not include membership rolls or marriage information for the eighteenth century.

<sup>25</sup> Without more complete church records for both the West Nottingham Presbyterian Church (in present day Maryland) and Buffalo Presbyterian Church (in North Carolina), I rely on the three histories and risk overlooking Settlement members not mentioned in them.

community's identity and possible motivations for their migration from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. I suggest that the Nottingham Settlement's pioneering generation migrated to central North Carolina for one reason—chiefly, the opportunity to own land and increase property. Appendices include the brief biographies mentioned earlier as well as supplemental material. A bibliography of works cited and consulted follows.