

Applying Old World Habits to the New: Life in South Carolina at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century

Author(s): Albert J. Schmidt

Source: *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Nov., 1961), pp. 51-59

Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3816284>

Accessed: 26-07-2020 17:20 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of Pennsylvania Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Huntington Library Quarterly*

Applying Old World Habits to the New: Life in South Carolina at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century

By ALBERT J. SCHMIDT

WHEN EDWARD HYRNE arrived in the Carolinas early in the year 1700, Charles Town had been in existence for some thirty years. Carolinians, after having weathered attacks by Indians and Spaniards, had promoted rebellion against the aristocratic proprietors. Culpepper's Rebellion during the late seventies and subsequent unrest between 1683 and 1696 revealed that proprietary dreams of setting up a feudal domain in Carolina were not likely to be realized. The aristocracy was fighting a losing battle.

Such was the unsettled state of affairs the year of Hyrne's arrival in the New World. Almost nothing is known of the early life of the man; he was nearing forty-five and was listed as a Norfolk merchant.¹ He assuredly was not the type who would have been in the vanguard that founded Charles Town in 1670, nor did he leave England for any such romantic reason as religious or political persecution; he left simply to avoid his creditors who were pressing hard upon him.²

Edward Hyrne was not for undertaking this American enterprise alone. He had left in England his second wife, Elizabeth, some twenty-five years his junior. She, the daughter of the late Sir Drayer Massingberd of South Ormsby, Lincolnshire, had married Edward in 1697 quite against her family's wishes. Her family was even more distressed when she joined her husband in South Carolina before the year 1700 had ended.

Elizabeth and Edward Hyrne purchased on the Medway River

¹See Mabel L. Webber, "Hyrne Family," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, XXII (1921), 101-118, and anon., "Historical Notes," *ibid.*, XXVI (1925), 172-173.

²This article is based on correspondence which passed between the Massingberds of Ormsby, Lincolnshire, and the Edward Hyrnes of South Carolina. The author is indebted to Mrs. Joan Varley and Mrs. Dorothy Williamson Owen, formerly archivist at the Lincolnshire Archives Committee, Lincoln, for calling attention to the existence of these letters which have been deposited there. The author is equally grateful to Miss Thurlby of Lincoln for transcribing them.

not far from Charles Town a plantation of some 2,500 acres. They resided in "the best Brick-house in all the Country" and started their family. The acreage was mainly fenced in and besides the house contained a hundred and fifty head of cattle, four horses, an Indian slave "almost a Man," a few hogs, and household stuff. The plantation had one swamp of some 600-700 acres that abounded in cypress, the timber of which, in the words of Elizabeth's husband, was "the best for building & most other uses that this part of the World affords"³

What must it have been like for a young girl to be propelled from her comfortable seventeenth-century English country environment into the primitive one of colonial America? This sort of experience, if not unique on our first frontier, at least takes on an exceedingly human quality as we read the girl's letters to her Lincolnshire gentry kin.

By our standards Elizabeth was spoiled and exceedingly unreasonable in almost every way. The excessive demands she made on her brother and other relatives in England suggest that in her immaturity she was wholly unprepared to meet the enormous challenge of frontier life; on the other hand, the letters reveal her determination to make the plantation a profitable and commodious home similar to that which she had enjoyed during her Lincolnshire youth. She was quite prepared to live in Carolina, at least until the means were procured to return to England in comfort and without fear of Fleet Street's debtor prison.

These transplanted Englishmen who came in search of fortune and status were nearly always pressed for ready capital. They purchased their homes in installments, just as do we in our day, but the property offered no insurance for immediate prosperity. More money was needed to buy slaves and equipment, for all the cypress timber in the world was worthless unless the labor to exploit it could be obtained. Edward put it this way: "I can make little Advantage of it till I can compass a good Gang of Negroes; but God knows when that will be. I have this Day bought One choise Young Negro (a Cooper by Trade) for £60; £10 down the rest a Year hence: to Morrow expect to buy another for Thirty odd Pounds; & then I shall have 4, 2 Men, & 2 Boys; wth wch I hope shall pick up a Livelyhood till God enables

³Edward Hyrne to Burrell Massingberd, Charles Town, Jan. 19, 1701/2, Massingberd Mundy Deposit, Lincoln, M 21/7, hereafter cited as M.M.D.

me to do better.”⁴ Elizabeth begged her brother Burrell, a lawyer in London, to send “one hundred pounds as it would doe us a great kindness for we very much want slaves & we would pay it with interest in a very short time.” Aside from cypress, she noted, they could “rais monys” from rice, pitch tar, Indian corn, rye, Indian and English peas, cedar, oak, and other timbers.⁵ This same enterprising spirit, restrained by the lack of capital, showed itself another time when Elizabeth observed to her brother that “since the act has pased in England for incouragement of Navel Stores,” the plantation was worth more by “several hundred pounds.” The reason: “we have lite-wood to make ten thousands barrells of tar and Timber fitt for mast and all other sorts of Timbers for the building of ship in great abundance.”⁶

Elizabeth and Edward had purchased the plantation with the expectation that her inheritance would see them through the uncertain future; however, the bequest was long delayed by litigation and distrust of Edward by Elizabeth’s family. Financial problems being thus compounded, requests for money in the letters were almost constant. Despite this nagging matter, Elizabeth persevered in her homemaking. Her needs and accomplishments show us what must have been typical of many ladies new in colonial society. Since commodities were lacking when she commenced housekeeping, she immediately petitioned brother Burrell and others in England. She reminded her brother once that “a great many things which I wrot for in my last which you have not sent me, and I know not what to doe for want of them for they are not to be bought here for love nor mony.” These items included a great brass pot, two dozens of pewter plates, three chamber pots, basins, and pottingers for the children, some trenchers, “two sasepans one to hould one gallon the other one quart,” and a “high cane chair with a table to it” for her baby boy. In addition she requested “any thing of mine that is in England. Send it me the

⁴Ibid.

⁵Elizabeth Hyrne to Burrell Massingberd (n.d.), M.M.D. M 21/67.

⁶Ibid., Nov. 22, 1705, M.M.D. M 21/21. In another letter (June 2, 1702, M.M.D. M 21/9) she had previously stated: “I belive we might rais money to pay for our plantation with only making of Tar which is ready mony in this Country and we have more syprus & oke timber then would clear at that we ow in the world by fare. We have many other ways that we might rais but these be greatest for we have eight hundred Acres of land full of large syprus Trees which is the best Timber in the Country”

chest of draws that is att Aunt Fowlers. Some of the Childrens things may be put in it being not full. Our cup ring and spoons, the pichires and draws frame att Mrs Evances . . . I would have sent. The pictures must [be] put in a wooden case with a thin board between every one and the gilded frames must be don aboute with cotten. There must not be to much rome in the case. If there is, it will break them. The things you sent by [Captain] Flavel being put so soon aboard and having a long passage many of them were spoiled with being mouldy." Once settled and with most of the necessities before her, she took cognizance of her social position. She needed six spoons: "if you cane send us six silver ones besides what we have." As for their plate "we cane make a shift without tell we shall gitt more mony tho all here that is of any note hath more and we are accounted as good as the best."⁷

When with child, Elizabeth made detailed preparations for her lying-in period. Her concern for the comfort of the midwife led her to write that she must have pictures, one "cote of armes," more plate and "all other sorts of household goods. If I had them against I lye inn which will be in May or June next for here is not like London that I can have people come to me at an hours warning. For my midwife liveth nere twenty miles from me so that if I have not convenances to entertain her and others at my house for any thing I know I may loose my life not being used to doe as many poor people doe here."⁸

Like any housewife Elizabeth found it trying to cook without the proper ingredients, nor was she remiss in asking for them. "If you can spare the mony, send me one frail of [ma]ligo [malaga] raisons and some corranes [currants] for I have had but two plum pudings since I came hither." She included on her food lists to England brown and white sugar candy, "which is note to be had here and is very useful," oatmeal, peas, bacon, rice, butter, and cheese. "If you can send me some of Jer. Landys [he must have been her village cheese-maker in England] best Cheeses it will doe me a kindness this County being so hot that Chees made here will not keep well."⁹ Related to these needs of the kitchen was a suggestion that one of her brothers,

⁷Elizabeth Hyrne to Burrell Massingberd (n.d.), M.M.D. M 21/67.

⁸Ibid., Feb. 8, 1702/3, M.M.D. M 21/14.

⁹Ibid. (n.d.), M.M.D. M 21/67.

a merchant, would be well advised to send a cargo of groceries for sale: "I beleive al sorts of Groserey wair will sell very well except sugar genger & jamacoe spice [probably Jamaica pepper]. . . . Black pepper has been sold here very lately for ten shillings and twelve & six pence per pound & never is under five shillings. Nutmegs are now five shillings per ounce but never under two s. and sixpence. Curran are generally two & six pence per pound"¹⁰

Spices and groceries were supplemented by fresh edibles from garden and orchard. Elizabeth Hyrne, not one to overlook this matter, wrote to her brother: "Here wants most sorts of English plants & seeds. . . . there being no plenty of English frutes but peaches and mellons." Strawberries were available, and the mulberries, though inferior, were good for silkworms; but, since that was about all, she urged her brother to "send me all sorts of frute trees that is not here and all sorts of garden seeds." She included specific directions: "Let it be writ upon ever paper of seeds what they be. The plants must be put in a chest with a good [torn] of earth for the roots to be in" and placed in the ship "bottom downwards." They were not to be sent from England until after Michelmas. Elizabeth minimized both effort and cost involved in this transaction: "I sopose they will coast you littell for any one that hath a garden will give you seeds or plants if they have to spair which is better then what you can bye except you bye of a friend for I have bought seeds that have bin so old they would never come up."¹¹

Obtaining clothing on the frontier posed another problem: Elizabeth Hyrne wrote for thread, sold only at Yarmouth, to knit "stokens" [stoles] and gloves, muslin for her and her sons, and a duster for herself. "It being too hot in the sumer to wear worsted and to Cold in the winter for thred therefor pray send some fine worsteds of white, blue, and grey. You may bye one pice of garlick holland [garlits, a linen cloth imported from Germany] whereof may be made shifts [an undergarment] and aprons for the children and the rest sent to me, I wanting some for shirts for my husband & son & aprons for myself."¹² She complained of the condition of those items of apparel which had recently been received from England: many were moldy

¹⁰Ibid., March 16, 1708/9, Charles Town, M.M.D. M 21/42.

¹¹Ibid. (n.d.), M.M.D. M 21/67.

¹²Ibid., June 2, 1702, M.M.D. M 21/9.

and “not one pair of gloves [was] fit to ware. The lase of burrys [her son Burrell] cote was turned like copper and he havin to grate loger head his hat was so littell he could never ware it.” His masque also was too small while those for her husband were “so corce & heave” that he, too, would be unable to wear them, especially in hot weather. The displeasing quirk in Elizabeth’s nature revealed itself when she insisted that her husband must have “a fine lite one [masque] & one short perwig which I wonder you [Brother Burrell] did not send you knowing he has lost his long one & here is no perwig makers.”¹³ This same unpleasant disposition is reflected in another instance when she lists her own needs in cloth and clothing: “I desire if ever you should have such a small Cargoe to send to me again it may be laid out either in shifs, garliks, hollands, or printed callicoës and not in such fooles bawbles as Mr. Holland bought.”¹⁴ One would like to assume that the weather and not Elizabeth’s social airs prompted her request of silks. Not unexpectedly, she showed great displeasure at their condition upon arrival: “The silks you sent came all safe except *the yellow which* was all spotted with the dampness of the vessall and wanted *six yards* according to the invoice. So i desire if you send me any more silks not to send any yellow for that coller is jenarally spotted before it coms here but to send me any other colers and some black to make me a good firbelow’d scarfe which I want very much.” Lest her complaints be misconstrued she thanked her brother by way of suggesting that silks and “lite threed sattens are good things to send over hither.” Elizabeth often charged her brother with ignoring her requests and not answering her letters; perhaps he, too, considered her unreasonable.¹⁵

¹³Ibid. (n.d.), M.M.D. M 21/67.

¹⁴Ibid., Nov. 22, 1705, M.M.D. M 21/21.

¹⁵Ibid., March 16, 1708/9, Charles Town, M.M.D. M 21/42. Unquestionably Elizabeth Hyrne felt herself forsaken and abused by her brother. She once wrote “I am well asured you will agree to this small request if you have any respect left for me *tho I am senceble it is much* abated since I saw you especially when I look over those letters you have sent of late and those *you sent formerly*. However [I] canot think you have lost all your affections towards mee knowing I have not lost any towards you” (M 21/42). Her dependence upon her brother for her inheritance often flared into anger as evidenced by one letter in which she wrote “If you will not send me the mony that I have sent for then I shall resolve to come to England but not to stay. For you may ashur your self I will never live in England for you to live so great as I hear you doe and I to live worse then your sarvant. For what ever you may think of me I know not but I know my self to be of the same fammely as you are and your

Besides home, food, and apparel, a wife must care for her family. Her son Burrell, named for his ever-beleaguered uncle, was the subject of requests for clothes, shoes, and whatever else he lacked. Needless to say, his uncle was expected to provide these staples and to bear responsibility for his education as well. Burrell, writing at the age of nine, reminded his uncle of his mother's great hardship in keeping him in school; moreover "in a little time I am to Enter into the Grammar: bucas there is no Latin School-Books, to be got here, I presume to Desire, that you would be pleased to Send me besides a (Lilie's) Grammar, Sententix Puriles, Cato's Distichs, Corderius Coloq' [an elementary Latin text prepared by Mathurin Cordier], Aesops Fables, Ovid's Tristib' & his Metamorphos' and a good Dictionary with the Storys."¹⁶ Evidently the uncle acknowledged some responsibility for his nephew, for Elizabeth later thanked him for paying for her son's schooling. She expressed satisfaction that he "is learning Arithmatick and comes on in his learning very well," but lamented that "here is *no lattin books to be bought.*" He studied Latin, she noted, in the hope that his uncle would "in little time send for your likeness and take *better care of him* than I am capable off in making him a Lawyer."¹⁷ The books requested by young Burrell point again to his ambitious mother who left no stone unturned to prepare him for the inns of court under the tutelage of his uncle.

For her husband Elizabeth Hyrne requested "iron tools for husbandry and building powder & all sorts of shott" and "a small hunting sadle for his Cow keeper as cheap as one as you can git but it must be like to hunt after catle." Elizabeth had need of a saddle for herself, "a side sadle made of a cofoie [coffoy, a fabric] lett it be an easy seat not leaning two forward with two pomels the pomels not being two close."¹⁸

Edward's problems were largely financial; some of his needs for the plantation are recorded in "An Invoice of Goods proper for So Carolina":

own sister & the wife of a Gentleman therefore no ways your inferior only in Estate" (Nov. 22, 1705, M 21/21).

¹⁶March 14, 1708/9, M.M.D. M 21/35.

¹⁷Elizabeth Hyrne to Burrell Massingberd, March 16, 1708/9, Charles Town, M.M.D. M 21/42.

¹⁸Ibid. (n.d.), M 21/67 and June 2, 1702, M 21/9.

Fine Holland Checks
 Fine printed Callicoës & some courser, good Colours
 Fine broad Tickings, narrow Stripes
 Narrow Ditto
 Broad & Narrow Garlicks
 Holland at 2s 6d per Ell
 Brown, Blue & White Osnabugs [Osnaburg, a kind of coarse linen
 originally made in Osnabruck, North Germany]
 Womens Shifts
 Mens, & Boys, Womens & Girls Worstead Stockings
 Men's Ditto, fine, some to rowle, & some short
 Men's Druggets very good
 Blue, Red, & Light colowred Shalloons
 Mohair of all Colours
 Mens best Mohair-Buttons, Coat, & Breast
 Men's Hatts, little in the Head
 Boy's Ditto, some fine, but most course
 Fine Narrow Bone-Lace-Edgings
 Some Fine writing Paper

Goods proper for the Winter

Ruggs several Sizes
 Blankets Ditto
 Course Broad-Cloth
 Kersies course, some Fine
 Blue, & Red Duffells [duffel or duffle—coarse woolen cloth]
 Broad Hoes, & some narrow
 Nails from 4d to 10d, most 4d also some 20d.
 Locks of all Sorts, Frying-Pans
 Spades, Crosscut-Saws, some Hand-Saws
 Broad & falling-Axes
 Pistol Powder, Bullets about 22 to the Pound
 Several Sizes of small Shott
 One Piece Blue-Broad-Cloth about 12 or 14s per yd.
 One small Barr'll fine glazed Gunpowder¹⁹

The Hyrnes' story is only outlined above. Their struggle to keep the plantation and to make a profit from it was indeed great. They lost one son shortly after birth; they lost by fire their lovely brick house. Then Edward, desperate because of their financial straits, returned to England to obtain funds only to be clapped into the Fleet

¹⁹Dated July 17, 1705, Charles Town, M.M.D. M 21/20.

Street debtor prison. Nonetheless, the family did stay in South Carolina and eventually prospered. The letters from which this narrative was written reveal the critical problems confronting the pioneers, especially the severe trial of adjusting to entirely new conditions. They wash away much of the sentimental romanticism often associated with our colonial past, but, happily, they do so without destroying the genuine epic quality which assuredly was there.