



From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and Their Migration to Colonial South Carolina (Carolina Lowcountry and the Atlantic World)

Bertrand Van Ruymbeke

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From New Babylon to Eden traces the persecution of Huguenots in France and the eventual emigration of a small bloc of the French Calvinist population to colonial South Carolina. Once there, rather than isolate themselves as a separate religious enclave, they chose instead to integrate into the Southern strain of nascent Anglo-American society, dominated by slavery and the Church of England. Through intermarriage and adaptation to the new economic and political environment, Huguenots rapidly numbered among the most influential and successful colonists, leaving a persevering legacy throughout Charleston and the lowcountry. In a volume devoted to the first generation of Carolina Huguenots, Bertrand Van Ruymbeke describes in detail their gradual transformation from French refugees to South Carolina planters. Van Ruymbeke recounts the escalating abuse that led to the Huguenot exodus from France and tells how approximately five hundred emigres settled in South Carolina. He credits their decision to relocate to the vigorous marketing efforts of the Lord Proprietors, the owners and rulers of the province, who promised the French Calvinists a veritable Eden. adapted to the new environment by abandoning the silk, olive oil, and wine trades for the more lucrative pursuits of Indian trade, cattle ranching, and rice planting. Placing the Carolina migration in the context of the larger Huguenot diaspora, Van Ruymbeke proffers an account that challenges accepted history. Describing their settlement as a process of acculturation and creolization rather than simply assimilation, he contends that the majority of Calvinists were adamant about creating their own churches but were thwarted by an Anglicized elite eager to carve itself a niche within Anglo-Carolinian society. He also reveals that most members of the initial generation were moderately - though not exceptionally - prosperous and, rather, that it was their descendants who acquired the wealth often associated with lowcountry Huguenots. Van Ruymbeke concludes with an epilogue describing the Huguenot legacy in South Carolina and the construction and maintenance of a local Huguenot memory since the 1880s.

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