

European Accounts of Coastal Indian Villages

Barlowe's Description of a Palisaded Village on Roanoke Island, 1584

The village contained nine houses constructed of cedar and was “fortified round about with sharp trees, to keep out their enemies, and the entrance into it made like a turnpike very artificially [artfully]” (Quinn 1991, pp. 106–108).

Caption of Theodor De Bry's Engraving of Pomeioc Village

“The towns of this country are not unlike those in Florida, but they are neither so well built nor so carefully looked after. They are surrounded with poles stuck into the ground and have only a narrow entrance. Only the chief and his principal men live in houses. On the right in the picture is the temple . . . On the opposite side is the King's house. These dwellings are made with posts joined to each other and covered with matting, which can be rolled up to let in light and air” (Hulton 1984, p. 125).

Thomas Hariot's Description of North Carolina Villages, circa 1585

“Their towns are small . . . where a village may contain but ten or twelve houses—some perhaps as many as twenty. The largest town we saw had thirty houses. In many cases the villages are walled with stakes covered with the bark of trees or with poles set close together. The houses are built of small poles attached at the top . . . The poles are covered from top to bottom either with bark or with mats woven of long rushes. The dwellings are usually twice as long as they are wide” (Quinn 1991, pp. 369–370).

John Lawson's Description of Native American Houses in North Carolina, 1701

“They get very long poles, of pine, cedar, hickory, or any wood that will bend; these are the thickness of the small of a man's leg . . . which they generally strip of the bark, and warm them well in the fire, which makes them tough and fit to bend; afterwards they stick the thickest ends of them in the ground, about two yards asunder, in a circular form, the distance they design the cabin to be, (which is not always round, but sometimes oval) then they bend the tops and bring them together, and bind their ends with bark of trees . . . then they brace them with other poles, to make them strong; afterwards, cover them all over with bark, so that they are very warm and tight, and will keep firm against all the weathers that blow” (Lawson 1967, pp. 180, 182).