

HUGHES, PRYCE (c. 1687 - 1715), American colony planner

Name: Pryce Hughes
Date of birth: c. 1687
Date of death: 1715
Parent: Mary Hughes (née Pryce)
Parent: Richard Hughes
Gender: Male
Occupation: American colony planner
Area of activity: Travel and Exploration; Business and Industry
Author: Eirlys M. Barker

Pryce Hughes of Llanllugan, Montgomeryshire, was the eldest of three sons and three daughters of Richard Hughes (1663-1700) of Frongoch, chief steward at Powis Castle, and Mary Pryce (1663-1700). The Llanllugan estate came to the Hughes family through this marriage. Pryce succeeded his father as agent to **William Herbert, the second Marquess of Powis**, while the latter was in exile as a suspected Jacobite.

Pryce and his brother, Richard (c.1689-1711), envisaged an American colony for the poor of Wales on the Mississippi River, a region then in contention between Britain, France, Spain and its various Indigenous inhabitants. Their inspiration is not clear, but Pryce was certainly influenced by Thomas Nairne, a leading figure in the proprietary colony of Carolina. Nairne was its 'Indian agentstart correction-->' and corresponded closely with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Possibly the two met when Nairne visited England in 1710 to promote his concept of an expanding British empire based on 'Christian' principles and fair trade with the Native Americans. Hughes's colony was also to be financed through the lucrative trade with Indigenous peoples. He used his **Herbert** connections through the Duchess of Ormonde to engage Queen Anne's personal support for the colony he named Annarea.

Richard Hughes ventured to Carolina first with three indentured servants from Llanllugan but he died of a fever in October 1711. He had bought an estate of 5,000 acres from Carolina's Proprietors and established himself as a merchant. Letters in both the National Library of Wales and the Caroliniana Archives in Columbia, South Carolina, reflect the bond between Pryce Hughes and Nairne, who had notified Pryce of his brother's death. They also provide details of their vision. A letter to his brother-in-law, Richard Jones of Oerffrwd, reflected his strategy. Hughes believed the Welsh would make perfect colonists because of their 'frugal, down right honest, generous & loyal temper'. Jones was to ensure Hughes's plans reached the Queen and to acquire the necessary ships and supplies. Jones was also in charge of recruiting 500 Welsh families, making sure that they were truly needy, as he did not intend to 'rob ye country of others'. If the Welsh did not avail themselves of this opportunity, he would 'return home & see them starve rather than give such lazy timerous drones ye least farthing'.

Pryce Hughes had finally arrived in Carolina by early 1713. He became an official Indian agent, settling disputes between traders and natives and expanding Carolina's interests among Indigenous nations, such as the Choctaw and Natchez, formerly French trading partners. He studied Indian languages and documented the frontier areas. While his papers have not survived, many early maps of the Southeast are based on his information.

He was detained by French agents early in 1715 as he represented both an economic and a diplomatic threat to the infant colony of Louisiana, blocking the Mississippi route to the French in Quebec. This was a time of European peace, therefore Hughes was treated with honour as the 'King's Lieutenant of Carolina' by the governor of Louisiana, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, and released a few days later.

This is the last reliable record of Hughes. His release coincided with the outbreak of a massive Indigenous uprising, the Yamasee War that killed hundreds of traders and frontier dwellers, including Thomas Nairne, and 'untold numbers of Native American warriors'. One of Hughes's indentured servants, Rowland Evans, inherited much of his American estate.

The Hughes brothers' vision for a Welsh colony, roughly where Natchez lies today, reflects a moment in time that could have changed both Welsh and American history, were it not for its unfortunate timing.

Authors

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Revised by the editorial team, 2024

Sources

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